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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

WRITING THE "ORDINARY": INDIAN SOUTH AFRICAN WRITING AS WOMANIST PROSE

BY

MADHAVI JAISWAL

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring 1994

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Dr. S. Slemon

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Date: 15 December, 1993

For Alex

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the works of three contemporary Indian South African writers: Ahmed Essop, Jayapraga Reddy, and Farida Karodia. The study focuses on their short story collections: Essop's Hajji Musa and the Hindu-Firewalker, Reddy's On the Fringe of Dreamtime and Other Stories, and Karodia's Coming Home and Other Stories. It examines how these writers create a space to articulate simultaneously issues of race, gender, and class in their works.

The introduction discusses Indian South African history and writing, and puts the works of Essop, Reddy, and Karodia's works into context. The first chapter examines how, by writing the "ordinary," these authors fracture the Black/White binary and create a space for an Indian South African articulation. The theory of the "ordinary" is derived from two articles: "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa" and "Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African fiction, written by Njabulo S. Ndebele, a South African writer and critic. Writing the ordinary establishes an Indian racial and cultural presence within South Africa. However, this is not a separatist move, and the integrationist political vision of Essop, Reddy, and Karodia is revealed through an analysis of setting, characterisation, and theme.

The second chapter examines how writing the "ordinary" allows gender issues to be raised alongside issues of race and class. Within South Africa, "womanism" is seen as a cultural/literary theory which enables a simultaneous analysis of the questions of race, gender, and class. This concept of "womanism" was formulated by Alice Walker, an Afro-American writer and critic, and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, an African critic. Given both the South African

situation and the nature of Indian South African patriarchy, I argue that Essop, Reddy, and Karodia establish a womanist discourse in their works and work towards the healing of entire people.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Historical Background 1

Indians in South Africa: "From South African Indians to Indian South Africans" 2

Indian South African Writing 11

Chapter 1: Writing the "Ordinary": A Multi-Racial Vision 20

Modes of Writing: The "Spectacular" Versus the "Ordinary" 20

Indian South African Writing and the "Ordinary" 24

Setting 27

Characterisation 47

Theme: Political Visions 53

Chapter 2: Towards a Womanist Discourse 62

Introduction 62

Womanism: An Assertion of Difference 67

Womanism in the South African Context 76

Ahmed Essop's Hajji Musa and the Hindu-Firewalker 79

Jayapraga Reddy's On the Fringe of Dreamtime and Other Stories 92

Farida Karodia's Coming Home and Other Stories 101

Conclusion 109

Works Cited and Consulted 110

Appendix: A Bibliography of Indian South African Writers in English 114

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GP	Meer, The Ghetto People
PISA	Meer, Portrait of Indian South Africans
"Rediscovery"	Ndebele, "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa"
"Turkish Tales"	Ndebele, "Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African Fiction"

First Insult

Aboard the 'S. S. Truro'
they set sail from bombay
and arrived at Port Natal . . . .

brown strangers
clad in loin clothes
cultured labourers
with topees and turbans,

they knelt and kissed
the clod of this country
and a voice within said,
'Afrika!'

Then their moment of meditation
was shattered by the first insult
'coolie come here . . . .!'

Essop Patel (*The Bullet and the Bronze Lady*, 14)

Introduction

Historical Background

Indian South Africans constitute about 3% of the total population of South Africa, and form the fourth largest group following the Whites, Africans, and Coloureds (Ginwala 4). They constitute 3.4% of the oppressed majority, a majority that primarily includes Africans and Coloureds, and have been actively involved in the South African struggle for freedom (Ginwala 4). Not only have Indian South Africans been involved in resistance movements, but they have also produced literature. In the international English-speaking literary world, as in the political world, their presence has been largely ignored and the focus has been on the literature of the two major contestants for political power--Whites and Blacks. But it is important that their writing be recognized. A recognition of their writing implies a recognition of their physical presence within South Africa, and this is important in order to ensure their political future there. Moreover, Indian South African writing adds another dimension to the South African situation by fracturing the Black/White binary, offering a new and specific perspective. Indian South African writing enables a better understanding of the workings of apartheid: that is, the grading of people according to their skin tones, where white is at the highest end of the scale and black the lowest. It offers insight into the politics of colour and its operation not only within South Africa but also throughout the world. In my thesis, in order to effect this recognition, I am focussing on Indian South African writing. In order to fully appreciate their writing, we have to see them in context of their history, and I would like to begin with a brief history of Indians in South Africa.

Indians in South Africa: "From South African Indians to Indian South Africans"[1]

Indian South Africans emigrated to South Africa in two major waves; the first was constituted of indentured labourers, and the second of *free* or *passenger* Indians (Meer, PISA 10). British capitalism created both the demand for labour and the economic conditions in India that compelled labour to emigrate (Ginwala 5). Due to the abolition of slavery, "subjugated India replaced Africa as the supplier of labour on colonial plantations" (Meer, GP 2). Tracing the arrival of the Indian labour force in Portrait of Indian South Africans, Fatima Meer, an Indian South African sociologist, writes:

> On November 16th, 1860, S. S. Truro, the little paddle-steamer from Madras, docked in Durban. The next day the first Indians disembarked on South African soil--342 persons, mainly South Indian Hindus, with a sprinkling of Christians and Muslims. There were among them 83 children under the age of 14, and 75 women between 16 and 46 years of age. Later in the month, on November 26th, the S. S. Belvedere arrived from Calcutta with 351 Indians with exactly the same number of children and 63 adult women. They came mainly from the South and East of India. (10)

The immigration of indentured labourers continued until 1913, when it was officially banned. According to Frene Ginwala, an Indian South African journalist, the indentured Indians formed a group despite the differences of religion, caste, and language: "New unions were formed aboard ship or in Natal. Having indentured (sic), life in the transit camps, on board ship and

---

[1] This subtitle is taken from Frene Ginwala's Indian South Africans (8).

in the conditions on the estates made the maintenance of caste distinctions and rituals impossible. . . . On the estates, the mines, factories, and railways the heterogeneous Indians mingled and formed an economic class" (5).

Then, in 1869, "a new wave of immigration began, that of traders from the West coast, from the port of Bombay," in order to cater to the special needs of indentured Indians (Meer, PISA 15). These were the *free* or *passenger* Indians, as distinct from indentured Indians (Meer, PISA 16). This group, primarily composed of Muslims and Hindus, came "mainly from Gujarat, and the Gujarati language and culture was [sic] added to an already complex South African Indian Society, representative of several languages and several religions" (Meer, PISA 15). Later on they were joined by another group, a small number of accountants, teachers, and priests, and together these non-indentured Indians formed an identifiable and coherent group bound together by common economic interests (Ginwala 5).

Soon after their arrival in South Africa, both indentured and passenger Indians came into conflict with the Whites, primarily British and Afrikaner. According to Ginwala: "The introduction of indentured immigration to Natal had provoked conflict between an alliance of plantation owners and metropolitan capital, and the ordinary white settlers" (7). Although the former needed plantation workers, the latter "made demands for compulsory repatriation of labour on completion of contracts (Ginwala 7). Indentured labour was cheaper and more exploitable than White colonial labour, and White workers began to see them as a threat when attempts were made to introduce the indentured labourers to semi-skilled occupations (Ginwala 7). This led to mass demonstrations in Natal in 1897 by white workers (Ginwala 7).

The passenger Indians presented another problem to the Whites. Since they were mainly traders, the colony felt that they were a threat to their monopoly in commerce and agriculture (Ginwala 8). Both these groups, categorized as Asians or Indians, began to be seen as a threat to the colony's interests because they claimed equality with white settlers on imperial grounds (Ginwala 8). Whereas the ex-indentured quoted a pledge that Indian labour on completion of contracts would have a right to settle on the colony and be granted a status "with privileges no whit inferior to that of any other class of her Majesty's subjects resident in the colonies," the passenger Indians claimed equality on the grounds that British Indian subjects had been specifically promised equality with white subjects throughout the Empire by Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1858: "There shall not be in the eyes of law any distinction of colour, origin, language or creed, but the protection of the law, in letter and substance shall be extended impartially to all alike" (qtd. in Meer, PISA 23).

These conflicts led to strong anti-Indian feeling and propaganda. In 1897, restrictions were placed on the entry of free Indians to the country and finally in 1913, a complete ban was placed on Indian immigration (Ginwala 7). Repatriation was seen as the answer to the Indian problem, and in order to encourage it several oppressive laws were formulated. For the indentured Indians, a law was passed in 1895 the terms of which forced "every ex-indentured Indian *'who failed, neglected or refused to return to India, or to become re-indentured in Natal'* to pay £3 annually for a license authorising his residence--this at a time when Indian wages averaged about ten pounds per annum" (Meer, PISA 26). The restrictions on the economic activities of passenger Indians or "self-employed Indian South Africans in various parts of the country covered three main areas: their freedom to trade was curtailed

by licensing policies and restriction on ownership of real property; they were denied access to the direct exploitation of mineral wealth; and immigration policies restricted their freedom to move in and out of South Africa and to move freely from one part to another" (Ginwala 7). In addition to this, among other things, in Natal, both groups lost their franchise in 1896 (Meer, PISA 26).

Besides the laws that encouraged repatriation, concrete attempts were made to repatriate Indians through the years. Between 1914 and 1919, 7,363 persons were repatriated, and in the 1930's a scheme to settle Indians elsewhere in the Empire was considered (Ginwala 6). But these attempts were not successful, as Ginwala points out: "Opposition to repatriation, assisted emigration, or new colonization was wide-spread among Indians in South Africa, and the inducements did not significantly reduce the population" (6).

Given this history, we can study what Meer categorizes as the first three stages of Indian South African resistance movements (PISA 39). These stages, as opposed to the fourth stage, were marked by separatist politics. Their focus was on the status of Indians in South Africa in isolation from other oppressed groups; they were primarily concerned about their contract with the British government. In the first two stages, the "initial stage of political impotence that marked the early period of indenture changed to one of submitting evidence before commissions when such opportunities arose, and testing their rights in court" (Meer, PISA 39).

The third stage had two distinct phases: the Gandhi phase from 1894 to 1913 and the post-Gandhi phase which lasted until the late 1940's. The Gandhi phase began with the arrival of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in Durban in May 1893. It saw "the intellectualisation of the Indian political position and the adoption of a belligerent attitude to the Government" (Meer,

PISA 39). Gandhi's key contribution to South African Indian politics was to bring the indentured and passenger Indians together (Meer, PISA 28). In 1894 he founded the Natal Indian Congress, an organization of the trader class Indians. But since it was founded to protect the rights of Indians and promote their interests in South Africa, it led to the inclusion of the indentured and ex-indentured Indians (Meer, PISA 28). Gandhi formulated a general concept of the rights of Indians as a group and organized passive resistance campaigns for their liberation. But in all his political campaigns he advised Indians to keep their issues distinct from those of other non-White groups (Meer, PISA 28). As Ginwala notes: "Though the Indians had grievances in common with other non-whites 'they had little in common regarding the points of view from which each section can urge its claim' since British Indians could and did cite the Proclamation whilst Africans and Coloureds could not" (9). Although this decision was "tactical rather than racial," this "division persisted and set the pattern for many decades" (Ginwala 9).

After the departure of Gandhi in 1913, a period of diplomacy and compromise set in. The Indians believed "that justice would prevail in the Imperial context, through negotiation and persuasion" (Ginwala 9). According to Ginwala, they "saw their situation in Africa as arising simply from 'racial prejudice', which was stirred up periodically by trading competitors. They did not seek structural change, but considered that once white fears were laid to rest, their own status would improve" (9). And their struggle to seek a solution to the "'Indian Problem'" continued in isolation from White-African relations (9).

This 'isolationist' policy of Indian resistance movements was the result not only of tactics and/or beliefs, but also of several other reasons. One

important reason was the current status of Indians. Although they were subject to discriminatory legislation, compared to Africans, Indians were in a position of relative privilege: "they were exempt from pass laws, had a less circumscribed right to buy land, could consume European liquor and Indian workers could join trade unions" (Ginwala 9). Moreover, notwithstanding restrictions on economic advance, some Indians were very wealthy and formed a substantial middle class (Ginwala 8). The Indian political organizations were primarily in the control of the middle class and the "arguments for maintaining their privileges and continuing to seek for their extension by negotiation with the whites were very strong" (Ginwala 8).

Apart from economic and statutory differences, Africans and Indians were divided by culture, religion and language. According to Ginwala: "for both trader and worker there remained a consciousness of belonging to an ancient Indian civilization" (9). Quoting the Presidential Address at the 1902 session of the Indian National Congress, Ginwala further adds that this myth of "civilization" was also shared by the nationalist movement in India:

> "It is melancholy to have to reflect that the South African legislation should have so little knowledge of India and the circumstances of Indian life as to confound . . . the aboriginal inhabitant with the representative of a civilization older than any memory of man can recall, and in comparison to which the civilization and culture of Europe are but of yesterday." (8)

The division between Indians and Africans further increased as a result of the "artificial concentration" of Indians in geographic and economic areas of Natal and Transvaal (Ginwala 7). This concentration served both to bind

Indians together as a community and to discourage association with other communities.

The three "isolationist" stages of Indian politics in South Africa finally gave way to a fourth stage (a stage that dominates Indian politics in South Africa today) which was Gandhian in technique but integrationist in ideal (Meer, PISA 39). With the coming of the Nationalist government to power, the policy of segregation was officially recognized along with repatriation as an effective way to control the "Indian Problem" (Ginwala 6). It led to the introduction of the Ghetto Act in 1946 which was the precursor of the Group Areas legislation of 1950, a legislation which makes provision for each group to be allocated to specific areas (Ginwala 12). In 1913 the Africans had already been confined to reserves; now "the process was to be completed and Coloureds and Indians were also to be herded into Ghettos" (Ginwala 8). The incorporation of Indians as one more group within apartheid led to a gradual awareness of the relationship between their own status and that of the rest of the South African population, and strengthened their unity with other oppressed groups (Ginwala 14). So "while Indians responded to specific policies and legislation, they increasingly did so in the context of opposing apartheid in its entirety, and in unity with all those similarly engaged" (Ginwala 14).

This fourth stage of Indian politics was marked by changes within the political organizations themselves. There was a struggle amongst Indians for leadership of the Indian Congress, an organization which had earlier been in the hands of the small middle class. According to Ginwala:

> Stimulated by economic changes, the spread of education, radicalization provoked by World War II and the nationalist

> struggle for independence in India, a new leadership which unlike the previous one was drawn from all sections and interests won mass support for a programme that included the pledge to 'make common cause with other sections of non-European people, in common economic and political issues.' (9)

Consequently, in 1946 when Indians were offered representation on a communal basis in Parliament and the Provincial Council, they rejected it, and in 1947, the new leadership met with the African National Congress to work out a practical basis of co-operation for their organizations (Ginwala 9). The "common objectives listed in the resulting Joint Declaration of Co-operation included the extension of full franchise rights to 'all sections of the South African people'" (Ginwala 9).

The Durban riots in 1949 between Indians and Africans, in which 142 people died and more than 1000 were wounded, added a sense of urgency to this coalition (Ginwala 9). In 1955, the Congress of People was formed, comprising the South African Indian Congress, the South African Coloured People's Organisation and the South African Congress of Democrats (Bhana 226). They adopted the Freedom Charter embodying the hopes and aspirations of the Black people as a whole (1955). This seems to be the first official use of the term "Black" to define all the oppressed groups--Africans, Coloureds, and Indians/Asians--as opposed to the state term, "non-White," used to describe people of colour.

With the "imposition" of the Republic in 1962, the South African government gave official recognition to the de facto situation, and decided that Indians were henceforth to be regarded as a permanent part of the population (Ginwala 8). One hundred and two years after their arrival, they

had officially moved from being South African Indians to Indian South Africans (Ginwala 8), and by then over 90 per cent of the Indian population was South African-born and the Indian community was in its fourth and fifth generation (Bhana 242). The "hope of repatriating Indians, faint though it once might have been, was at last laid to rest" (Bhana 249).

With the official recognition of their status, the South African government offered them constitutional privileges under the policy of separate development so that the Indians along with the Coloureds could be coerced into eventual collaboration to support a minority government. One such "privilege" was the creation of South African Indian Councils (S.A.I.C). They began operating as a statutory body consisting of nominated members in 1968; in 1974 they became partly elective, and in 1981 they became fully elective (Bhana 249). In the November 1981 elections, more than 80% of the people stayed away, and in by-elections the following year, the "poll was even lower: 13.4% and 2.2%, confirming that separate development had not been accepted by Indian South Africans" (Ginwala 14).

In 1977, the government proposed a tri-racial parliament, a new constitutional dispensation which "envisaged the creation of three separate parliaments, one each for Indians, Coloureds and Whites" (Bhana 261). In the elections held in 1984 this offer was again rejected by voters. Justifying the rejection of the new constitution, Ginwala writes: "not only does it entrench apartheid by its blatant exclusion of the African majority from the South African polity, but also in its treatment of the Coloured and Indian minorities" (Ginwala 3). Today South Africa is in a state of upheaval and the future of Indian South Africans is still uncertain.

Indian South African Writing

This, then, is the historical background for my study of Indian South African literature in English. Although Indian South African writing is far from homogeneous, it shares one common feature, that is, most of the writing is overtly political. Given the South African situation and the precarious status of the Indian community, Indian South African writing is imbued with a sense of anxiety and urgency. Living on the fringe, Indian South Africans are never at the centre of power in their adopted home, and their writing (along with political organizations) is an expression of their political stance. For the sake of their present and in order to give direction to and ensure their future, Indians are unable to stay in cocooned communities and are forced to participate in the local politics. Their participation is ensured by the policies of the South African government itself. Focusing on the unique place of Indian South Africans, Rowland Smith writes:

> Not quite buffers between the two major contestants for political power, black and white, they are nevertheless potentially useful to either side, and although less privileged than the racial group in power, they are more privileged than the racial group resolutely kept away from power. Depending on whether they regard themselves as relatively underprivileged or relatively privileged, Indians . . . align themselves in opposition to the status quo or acquiesce in it. (64)

Out of these contradictory demands on the Indian community and its resulting anxiety emerges powerful literature that explores this difficult

situation. Indian South African writers reconfirm and entrench their sense of belonging, and propagate their stance within both their immediate community and the broader South African community. Having a say in the present ensures a say in the future of South Africa.

Indian South African writing plays an important role in communicating with the South African community. Not only does it open levels of communication with other groups, it also addresses the question of the negative image of the Asian/Indian prevalent in South Africa. This stereotypical image arose primarily from the anti-Indian propaganda promoted in the colony. Indians were seen as birds of passage, never assimilating and never really belonging. Neela Alvarez-Pereyre quotes from an article in a South African newspaper, The Star, titled "What goes into the Mind of the Man in Blue":

> Indians are an advanced outpost of countries struggling to get rid of their excess population . . . From the political point of view, the Indians must be regarded as a population group with strong capital resources who are . . . acting as instigators and organizers in passive resistance campaigns . . . and serving as an advanced post for the mother countries, India and Pakistan . . . This Asian group still recognizes the governments of the mother countries as their own and are loyal to them . . . yet insist on being regarded as full and equal citizens of the Republic of South Africa. (The Star, Saturday December 4, 1976, qtd. in Alvarez-Pereyre 54)

In their temporary state, the Indians were seen as a threat to both sides: "The Asiatic is as great a danger to the Coloured and Native community as he is to the white" (qtd. in Meer 24). According to Charles Ponnuthurai Sarvan in "The Asian in African Literature," this propaganda was mostly promoted by the Europeans. Indians were economic competitors and a threat and "increasingly the European preferred to see himself as the material and spiritual protector of the African against the Asian, hiding his economic aims under a lofty civilizing mission" (Sarvan 162). The missionaries, too, encouraged anti-Asian sentiments because "the Asians deeply attached to their ancient religions, proved intractable for conversion" (Sarvan 162). In The African Image, Ezekiel Mphahlele claims that Europeans in South Africa often incited Africans to violent hostility towards the Asians (Sarvan 166).

Anti-Indian sentiments were further strengthened by the actual position of Indians in the South African hierarchy. According to Sarvan: "The general impression remains that the black man's burden was not only the white but also the brown man, and the Asian, himself the victim of colonialism, does not find it easy to escape the strictures passed on imperialism" (Sarvan 167). In addition to their economic status, their attitude towards civilization and the difference in culture prevented easy assimilation with the Africans. The "conservatism of the Asian community strengthened when they found themselves in a foreign land: alien surroundings make a group conscious of its racial identity and they draw together for greater security" (Sarvan 165). This "conservatism" was also strengthened by their artificial concentration in certain geographic and economic areas.[2] Indian South Africans strove for racial equality with the Europeans with no thought about the Africans.

---

[2] In Indian South Africans, writing about the artificial concentration of Indians in geographic and economic areas, Frene Ginwala points out that in the early years over 80% of the Indians were concentrated in the province of Natal (7). She further adds "Dispersed through South

Both European propaganda and the initial political stance of Indian South Africans led to the creation of the Indian South African stereotype, both within and without literature. In Blame Me on History (published in 1963), Bloke Modisane writes:

> the social relationship between the Africans and the Indians is not so different from that between the black and white; far less different than is supposed by politicians. There is very little social contact, except on the master and servant level. The Indians reject and segregate against the Africans who are refused attention--or at best tolerated--in the swank Indian-owned milk bars, restaurants and cinemas. (133)

Later on in the book, commenting on the alliance resulting in the Congress of the People, Modisane writes: "in the locations we shouted down the alliance accusing the Indians of having feet in India and only their greed in South Africa. We feared in the event of a real showdown the Indians would desert the Struggle and wait to negotiate with the winner or avail themselves of the Government's repatriation scheme" (135).

But not all representations of Indian South Africans were negative. The gradual change in Indian South African politics was reflected positively in literature as well. Mphahlele writes in "A Point of Identity":

Africa they formed less than 3% of the population, in Natal they constituted over 12%" (7). In the Transvaal, the "early migrants were traders. The subsequent restrictions prevented ex-indentured from taking advantage of the variety of job opportunities available. As a result, in the Transvaal more than 90% of Indians remained in the commercial sector" (7).

> "And you think the Indian folk who join us in protesting are merely bluffing? And the whites, the Indians and Coloureds whose homes smell of police uniforms because of unending raids and who are banned and sent to prison--are they just having a good time, just putting on a performance? Well, I don't know, child of my mother-in-law, but that is a very expensive performance and not so funny." (qtd in Sarvan 167)

This passage represents a recognition of their changing stance. But changing attitudes takes time and Indian South African writing enables Indians to take part in this debate. Writing enables Indians to represent themselves --negating stereotypes, explaining their stance, and opening channels of communication. Their self-representation achieves an urgency due to the fact that their present and future in South Africa depends on their public image. Moreover, their writing forms part of the larger Indian African tradition and counteracts the stereotypical image of the Asian in Africa and in African writing as a whole.

Three contemporary writers working within the tradition of Indian South African literature are Ahmed Essop, Jayapraga Reddy, and Farida Karodia. The vision of a multi-racial present and future that these authors present in their works is derived from the fourth stage of Indian politics--the period of Indian South African coalition and integration with other oppressed groups within South Africa. Although these writers espouse integrationist politics in their works, their visions differ, depending on their gender, religion, and country of residence.

In this thesis, I focus on their collections of short stories: Essop's Hajji Musa and the Hindu-Firewalker, Reddy's On the Fringe of Dreamtime and

Other Stories, and Karodia's Coming Home and Other Stories. The short story, along with poems, seems to be one of the favourite media for South African writers. Explaining this phenomenon, Michael Vaughan writes:

> It seems evident that the full-scale fictional medium--the novel --implies a relatively spacious dimension of leisure and privacy, as a condition of its production and reception. This is no doubt why it has not developed into a popular medium with . . . South African writers. The short story, by contrast, requires a fraction of the time and space that a novel does. Its emphasis is upon pithiness and immediacy: it focuses upon the moment, the fragment. (128)

In fact, Essop and Reddy were published in various magazines and anthologies, before they put together entire collections. Unlike most novels, in collections of short stories the focus is not on one specific person or group; they feature the stories of a diverse range of people. This focus enables me to capture a sense of the Indian South African community and the South African community as a whole. However, my thesis only partially covers and illustrates the Indian South African tradition. In order to illustrate the range of this little known literature, I list some writers in a special bibliography at the end of the thesis.

Ahmed Essop (1931-), a Muslim man, was born in Dabhel, Surat, India but immigrated to South Africa with his parents. He was educated, lives, teaches, and writes in South Africa. His short story collection, Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker, was published in 1978 and won the Schreiner award in 1979. This collection is primarily set in pre-Group Areas

Act Fordsburg (Essop's hometown), a suburb within metropolitan Johannesburg. In this predominantly Muslim collection, Essop recreates a specific time in Indian South African politics--the gradual change from separatism to integrationism which followed the Ghetto Act of 1946, the Durban riots of 1949, and the Group Areas Act of 1950. This focus enables Essop to articulate his political vision, that is, the need to move beyond the Gandhi phase towards an integrationist resistance movement which includes all oppressed groups within South Africa.

Jayapraga Reddy, a Hindu woman of South Indian ancestry, was born, lives, and writes out of South Africa. Since 1991 she has been a lecturer at the University of Durban, Westville. Her collection of short stories, On the Fringe of Dreamtime and Other Stories, was published in 1987. Her collection is set in post-Group Areas Act South Africa. Unlike Essop's collection, it is not based in one township but primarily depicts Indian, Coloured, and African townships. Through stories of inter-racial interaction and understanding she captures the South African hierarchy of colour, and represents her vision of a multi-racial future, a future which ultimately includes Whites as well as with Africans, Indians, and Coloureds.

Farida Karodia was born and raised in a small town in South Africa. She emigrated to Canada in 1969, having previously taught in Zambia. Coming Home and Other Stories was published in 1988. These stories are based in a general South African setting[3], not in concrete historical locations like Essop's and Reddy's. In her "Author's note," Karodia states: "I have taken the liberty of changing place names, the names of townships and settings. . .." Her collection seems to be aimed primarily at an international audience, as suggested by the "glossary" of African terms that she includes at the end of the

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[3] Except "The World according to Mrs. Angela Ramsbotham," which is based in Zimbabwe.

collection. This audience also seems to affect the image of South Africa she creates and her vision of its future. Unlike Essop and Reddy, Karodia does not explore the hierarchy and tensions within the Black communities themselves. Like Reddy, her political vision for a South African future actively includes Whites alongside Indians, Africans, and Coloureds.

My thesis is divided into two chapters. Chapter one, "Writing the 'Ordinary': A Multi-Racial Vision," is divided into three sections: the first focuses on the concept of writing the "ordinary" versus the "spectacular"; the second on the representation of the "ordinary" in the short story collections of Essop, Reddy, and Karodia; and the third on the political, social, and literary advantages of writing the "ordinary" through a study of the setting, characterization, and theme in these collections. The theory of the "ordinary" is derived from two articles: "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa" and "Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African fiction, written by Njabulo S. Ndebele, a South African writer and critic. I will argue that these Indian South African writings also represent an extension of Ndebele's concept of the ordinary. Writing the ordinary, Essop, Reddy, and Karodia write as Indian South Africans and represent their vision of and for South Africa.

Writing the ordinary not only gives these writers the space to write as Indian South Africans, it simultaneously creates a space for analyzing gender issues. Chapter two, "Towards a Womanist Discourse," is divided into four sections: the first sets up the historical and current debates within South Africa over prioritizing race, class and/or gender in "race liberation" strategies; the second focuses on the concept of "womanism" as a political philosophy; the third argues for womanism as a cultural/literary theory relevant to the South African situation; and the fourth analyzes these Indian

South African works as womanist texts. The concept of "womanism" was simultaneously formulated by Alice Walker, an Afro-American writer and critic, and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, an African critic. Within South Africa, womanism is seen as a cultural/literary theory which enables a simultaneous analysis of the questions of race, gender, and class. Given both the South African situation and the nature of Indian South African patriarchy, I will argue that Essop, Reddy, and Karodia establish a womanist discourse in their works.

Chapter One

Writing the "Ordinary": A Multi-Racial Vision

Modes of Writing: The "Spectacular" Versus the "Ordinary"

In South Africa writing has been quite overtly political and literary work has displayed a high level of political preoccupation, engagement, and commitment. Given the South African situation where open and/or institutionalized political struggle has been repressed, and where the majority of the population is outside of its franchise, the relation between "literary activity and broadly political activity" becomes quite "evident and intense" (Vaughan 119). Literature, along with political organizations, becomes a means for political activity: for expressing discontent, for protest, and for mobilizing the public. At the end of the 1950's, with the banning of the major political organizations[1] and the declaration of a state of emergency throughout South Africa, writing became an important means of protest. Some writers who were actively writing during this period were Ezekiel Mphahlele, Alex La Guma, Can Themba, Bloke Modisane, and Webster Makaza. In "Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African Fiction" and "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa," Njabulo S. Ndebele officially labels this writing as "protest literature." Identifying its chief characteristic, he observes that "in general writers . . . seem to be clear about one thing: that their writing should show of themselves and their writers, a commitment to political engagement. . . . a poem or a work of fiction should most decidedly be written and read as

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[1]In 1960 the Pan Africanist Congress and the African National Congress were banned.

offering necessary political insights. It should 'strike a blow for freedom'" ("Turkish Tales " 328).

Ndebele's primary critique of protest writing is that it gives rise to the "spectacle of excess," the "spectacular" representation of the South African situation in literature. In order to make an active political statement and to have an immediate effect, this writing concentrates on the "surface symbols" of the South African reality, at the center of which is "the aggressive Boer who has taken three centuries to develop the characteristics of a massive wrestler" and the 'black' (non-white) victim ("Rediscovery" 143).[2] These characters are symbolic of the South African reality; they are "finished products, often without personal history," mere "ideas to be marshaled this way or that in a moral debate" ("Turkish Tales" 329). The stories then become a ritualistic enactment of South Africa under the yoke of apartheid and eliminate all unnecessary detail and specificity in order to drive home a political and moral lesson--an implicit and explicit indictment of injustice and a plea for change ("Turkish Tales" 329).

Summarizing the characteristics of the spectacular, Ndebele writes:

> The spectacular documents; it indicts implicitly; it is demonstrative, preferring exteriority to interiority; it keeps the larger issues of society in our minds, obliterating the details; it provokes identification through recognition and feeling rather than through observation and analytical thought; it calls for emotion rather than conviction; it establishes a vast sense of presence without offering intimate knowledge; it confirms without necessarily offering a challenge. It is the literature of the powerless

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[2] This is a reversal of colonialist Manicheanism --white/black, good/evil.

> identifying the key factor responsible for their powerlessness. ("Rediscovery" 150)

The result is that spectacular literature, working within the blanket binaries of the "symbols of evil" and the "symbols of the victims of evil" ("Turkish Tales" 329), ends up negating the very goal it sets out to achieve--change. Only observation, focus on specific details, and analysis, can reveal "the rationality . . . behind the brutality of the system" ("Rediscovery" 152). This understanding contributes to a growth of political consciousness, a growth which is a prerequisite for change ("Rediscovery" 152).

Ndebele offers "the ordinary" as a way out of the "spectacular" which derives from a focus on the surface reality of South Africa, a reality "so mind-bogglingly spectacular " as to almost totally engage the imagination of the "black writer, sometimes a direct victim, sometimes a spectator" of this reality (143). The ordinary focuses on the day-to-day lives of people, who "constitute the *very content* of the struggle, for the struggle involves people not abstractions," and is concerned with the way people actually live under such oppressive conditions ("Rediscovery " 156). Writing the ordinary, then, enables a focus on detail and specificity, a prerequisite for analyzing and understanding how apartheid really works, as well as on ways of dealing with it: "where before the South African reality was a symbol of spectacular moral wrong, it is now a direct object of change" ("Rediscovery" 152).

The ordinary, with its focus on the day-to-day life of people, although a way out of the spectacular surface reality, brings up the whole question of literature's contribution to political consciousness, engagement, and commitment, given the South African situation. The ordinary, according to Ndebele, is not directly resistance-oriented because, as he argues,

> we must contend with the fact that even under the most oppressive of conditions, people are always trying and struggling to maintain a semblance of a normal social order. They will attempt to apply tradition and custom to manage their day to day problems. . . . They will apply systems of values they know. Often those values will undergo changes under certain pressing conditions. The transformation of those values constitutes the essential drama in the lives of ordinary people. ("Rediscovery" 154)

The "range of problems is fairly ordinary enough but constitutes the active social consciousness of most people: will I like my daughter's boyfriends or prospective husband? how do I deal with my attraction to my friend's wife? what will my child become? . . . the list is endless" (Ndebele, "Rediscovery" 154).

According to Ndebele, although the ordinary focuses on those elements of life which are not explicitly resistance-oriented, this does not mean that it is apolitical ("Turkish Tales " 338). Living the ordinary within apartheid South Africa, every individual will ultimately be forced to take a stand with regard to the entire situation (Ndebele "Rediscovery" 156). The ordinary represents a "much wider and richer . . . more inclusive context of resistance" (Ndebele "Turkish Tales" 338). It demonstrates that both for the protagonists within the text and the writing itself, there is not only one means of combating the situation. Everyone does not have to make a spectacular political statement; the ordinary validates other responses, other ways of dealing with the situation. Not everyone can devote their life to active politics; people have families to look after and also the responsibility of

maintaining a society that can be returned to after the struggle is over. The "evocation of lived experience in all its complexities" enables a greater understanding and growth of consciousness among the readers (Ndebele, "Turkish Tales" 338).

Ndebele also focuses on the effect that protest writing, with its explicit political preoccupation, has on South African literature as a whole. He notes that in "societies like South Africa, where social, economic, and political oppression is most stark . . . 'taking a position' earns a work of art displaying it, the title of 'commitment'" ("Turkish Tales" 338). He further argues: "Clearly then according to this attitude, artistic merit or relevance is determined less by a work's internal coherence . . . than by the work's high level of explicit political preoccupation which may not necessarily be too critical of the demands of the artistic medium chosen" ("Turkish Tales" 328). As a result, "largely superficial" writing is produced, a writing of "surfaces" which is akin to spectacular reporting ("Turkish Tales" 328-29). The ordinary, with its "disciplined and rigorous attention to detail," adds to the development of a literary culture not solely dependent on active politics for its survival, a culture that will outlast the dismantling of oppressive political structures within South Africa ("Rediscovery" 157).

Indian South African Writing and the "Ordinary"

Although Ndebele's "ordinary" deconstructs homogenized binaries, he himself falls into the binary trap. In those very articles in which he formulates the concept of the "ordinary" ("Turkish Tales" and "Rediscovery"), when analyzing Black South African works that break with the tradition of "spectacle," he only focuses on African writers--among

others, Michael Siluma, Joel Matlou, Bheki Maseko, and Miriam Tlali. Ndebele's focus writes out those Indian South African authors who not only form part of this "Black" group, but who also write the ordinary--among others, Ahmed Essop, Jayapraga Reddy, and Farida Karodia. Writing the ordinary creates the space for these authors to write as Indian South Africans, as opposed to the spectacular, with its focus on homogenized binaries (White/Black, oppressor/oppressed) which eradicates racial, ethnic, and cultural presence. It enables them to establish their individual group identity, beyond the all-encompassing term "Black"--a term strategically chosen to unify all the oppressed groups, Africans, Coloureds, and Indians/Asians, as opposed to the state term "non-White." Writing the ordinary, Essop, Reddy, and Karodia establish the political, social, and cultural history of the Indian people within the South African context. By retrieving the past and capturing the present, these writers confirm a heritage, and thereby justify the current Indian presence and their right to a future in South Africa.

However, writing the ordinary, which deconstructs the politically strategic term "Black" in order to establish Indian South African specificity, is not a separatist move. By revealing the complexities within the term "Black," and depicting the Indian place within the South African hierarchy, Essop, Reddy, and Karodia contribute to an understanding of the apartheid system, an understanding that is a prerequisite for change. Moreover, their version of the ordinary also simultaneously includes some elements of the spectacular--overt political preoccupation and a focus on the collective. In Ndebele's words, this inclusion represents "an infusion of the ordinary into the spectacle," that is, it deals "with the ordinary concerns of people while placing those problems within the broad political situation in the country"

("Rediscovery" 156). This extended version of the ordinary stems from the anxious desire of these writers to clearly state their political stance so that they cannot be accused of propagating separatism. At the same time it is a product of their Indian South African heritage, and also represents the political vision of these writers.

In South Africa change requires both the growth of the individual and his/her involvement with collective political movements. This inclusive concept of the ordinary--both personal/political and individual/collective --comes from the need of Indian South Africans both to retain an individual group identity and to form part of the larger South African community at the same time. The model of the "*kutum*" provides them with such a framework. According to Meer, the concept of "*Kutum* (Gujrati, Hindustani and Urdu) and *Kudumbom* or *Kuduma* (Tamil and Telegu respectively)" defines "a kinship system of several nuclear families hierarchically arranged by male seniority" (PISA 64). She further argues that the "*kutum*" lays the basis for both individual group identity and a collective identity :

> In South African Indian life, the *kutum* lays the basis for individual group solidarity. The situation of political minority from which Indians suffer generally has led to the extension of the *kutum* bonds across traditional barriers of religion, language, economics and caste, resulting in a relatively closely knit Indian community. The same situation also kindles in them desires to form links with constituent non-Indian South African communities in order to be integrated into the South African social system. The desire for integration, however, is cautioned by a

> simultaneous desire to retain their composite identity in the social whole. (PISA 73)

Writing the ordinary, Essop, Reddy, and Karodia demonstrate a balance of the personal/political, and individual/collective in their setting, characterisation, and theme. These three categories of analysis--setting, characterisation, and theme--are derived from Ndebele's analysis of short stories in "Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African Fiction" and "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa."

Setting

Unlike spectacular writing, in which setting is symbolic and functions as a stage for "a ritual enactment of South Africa under the yoke of apartheid," Essop, Reddy, and Karodia create a more detailed geographical, historical, and cultural setting in their collections; they capture the specificity of both Indian South Africans and other groups who form the South African mosaic. The focus differs among these writers: Essop and Reddy concentrate more on the Indian community, while Karodia, writing from outside South Africa, concentrates equally on all groups--White, African, Coloured, and Indian. All three collections depict the hierarchy that exists between non-Whites and Whites, and retrieve both the individual group history and the common history of oppression of non-White people, an oppression which enables them to unite as a group--"Black."

In their collections, Essop, Reddy, and Karodia capture the specificity of the Indian South African community through geographical, historical, and cultural details. Besides a shared history of oppression within South Africa,

Indian South Africans also partially share a common Indian culture, as Neela Alvarez-Pereyre, an Indian South African writer, notes:

> There was a common culture which expressed itself in various ways. Outwardly: in dress and food habits (sic). At family level, the extended family system prevailed, with its duties but also its solidarity. The respective role and status of women were clearly defined, with a marked dependence of the latter on parents and the husband. The dead were revered, and religion formed a strong cement. (59)

Although Essop, Reddy, and Karodia capture the specificity of the Indian South African community, they do not portray it as a homogenized whole; they depict the regional, religious, ethnic, and class differences that exist within.

The same strategy is employed in depicting the presence of other communities within South Africa in these collections. Although they share some commonality and this is captured through a partial depiction of their geographical, historical, and cultural specificity, these communities do not form homogenized groups; differences of ethnicity, language, and class exist within. The result of this strategy is twofold. The creation of unified South African groups enables Essop, Reddy, and Karodia to capture their individual group histories and their specific place in the South African hierarchy. But by further deconstructing these homogenized groups, by revealing the complexity within, these writers go beyond "the South African surface reality." They deconstruct a "vast sense of presence" with "intimate details" and establish that details will have to be taken into account in

formulating a strategy for change. More importantly, this complexity also deconstructs the official homogenized categories--African, Coloured, and Indian--and proves that in spite of cultural differences, they do not form unified separate identities but share similarities with other groups. This unity within diversity, then, becomes symbolic of the South African multi-racial present and points towards its future.

The first three-fourths of Ahmed Essop's Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker is based in Fordsburg, Johannesburg, a predominantly Indian township in pre-Group Areas Act South Africa. This was a township Essop lived in until it was expropriated for whites in the late 1950's. Describing the setting of the collection, Lionel Abrahams writes:

> The stories centre on the vivid aromatic world of Johannesburg's Indian community in Fordsburg, with its blend of religious, political, cultural and economic preoccupations. This is not to suggest that the interest is defined by a racial line. Characters of every South African extraction occur in Ahmed Essop's pages. . . . (Foreword i)

The pre-Group Areas Act Fordsburg enables Essop to capture the presence of the different races that make up the South African mosaic--White (mostly infringing from the outside), African and Coloured (who live in closer proximity), and Indian. As Rowland Smith observes in "Living on the Fringe: The World of Ahmed Essop":

> the predominant flavor of the collection is that of Fordsburg and Vrededorp . . . small oriental slums sandwiched between white working-class areas and coloured properties, all close to the city centre. Racial mixing both voluntary and involuntary is still possible in Essop's Fordsburg and the ebullience of its crowded courtyards, shops and fruit-filled cafes is part of the pre-Sharpeville aura of South African life. (Smith 65)

In Essop's Fordsburg section, although the stories are primarily the stories of Indians, the stories of other races appear along and within their stories. In some stories the chief protagonists themselves are non-Indian: Dolly, an African man who inhabits this township and appears in passing in several stories, is the protagonist of "Dolly"; "The Commandment" is devoted to Moses, an African man, who is born and raised in this township and has never been to his homeland Transkei; and Milo, an African man, is the protagonist of "Obsession." This "racial mixing," then, enables Essop to set Indian South Africans within the larger South African context.

The township of Fordsburg and its resident community are created in the collection in several ways. First of all, certain locations recur like landmarks throughout the book: for example, Newtown Mosque, Broadway cinema, Orient House/Orient mansions, Terrace road, and most importantly, the communal "yard" where important community events take place. In fact four of the stories--"Dolly," "Two Sisters," "Father and Son," and "Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker"--unfold in "the yard." Secondly, the stories within the Fordsburg section are sometimes overtly linked to each other. "Two Sisters" opens with the arrival of Rookeya and Habiba in the "yard" and ends with their departure: "the sisters decided it was

dangerous living in the premises belonging to a madman. They found another apartment in Newtown and moved away" (48). This story is immediately followed by "Father and Son" which opens where "Two Sisters" leaves off: "Shortly after the two sisters left, the premises they had occupied were renovated and expensively furnished. Everyone was eager to see the arrival of the new occupants" (49). Thirdly, like the locations, the people inhabiting this township repeatedly appear throughout the Fordsburg section and together form a community. Aziz, Gool, Dolly, and Dr. Kamal, for example, appear as passing characters in several stories and also have their own individual stories within the collection. This community is further entrenched by the presence of the narrator, "I" (also identified as Ahmed), who appears throughout the Fordsburg section narrating and/or participating in most of the stories.

The people who inhabit this township, who form this community, are primarily Indian and Essop manages to capture the specificity of this heterogeneous Indian community in which people of different religions, provinces, and classes live together. This Indian community is populated primarily by Muslims and Hindus and their religion and/or province of Indian origin is reflected in their names: Ahmed, Hassen, Gool, and Aziz are Muslim; Mr. Das Patel, Yogi Krishnasiva and Mr. Moonreddy are Hindus, the former from Gujarat and the latter two from South India. Among Indian South Africans, religion had achieved an important place because, as Hilda Kuper argues in Indian People in Natal: "Religion is one field in which there has been no positive interference by Whites. . . [it] provides people with an identity and a security denied them in other spheres. In their religion they are not only free but equal" (215). Essop presents both Muslim and Hindu religious beliefs and their rituals within the collection;

"Hajji Musa and the Hindu Firewalker" depicts the Muslim ritual of exorcism and Hindu fire-walking side by side. Not only people of different religions but people of different classes and occupations inhabit Essop's Indian community. Among others, religious priests, politicians, shopkeeepers, landlords, waiters, school teachers, doctors, and lawyers find roles in these stories. But along with these diversities, Essop portrays the sense of solidarity engendered in the *kutum*. He captures the cultural structures that unite them as a community, including the patrilineal family system, the extended family system and the arranged marriage system, which were widely prevalent among Muslims and Hindus.

Essop partially captures the specificity of other races who form part of this community, either permanently as residents or temporarily as visitors. Whites and Africans of different classes and occupations inhabit the pages of this collection both as passing characters and as main protagonists. The collection also recreates the presence of hybrid figures, products of inter-racial relationships, who problematize the official hybrid category--Coloured. In "Red Beard's Daughter," Ben Areff is an Indo-African, and Bibi in "Dolly" is the "offspring of an Indian father and Dutch mother" (38); neither of them quite fit the Coloured category of half white/ half African. However, Essop's portrayal of these characters is limited by the fact that they are seen within the confines of a primarily Indian community and their stories are always negotiated through the Indian space. They are merely representatives of their groups and we don't get a clear picture of their communities.

Depicting these different races and showing them in contact with each other enables Essop to capture the South African racial hierarchy. In his collection, Essop recreates the vertical power structure--White, Indian, and

African.[3] The Whites do not inhabit Fordsburg but are visitors from Johannesburg, and primarily represent "the continued menace of the larger outside world before which that self-protecting oriental enclave is humiliated and powerless" (Smith 65). Next in the hierarchy is the Indian community who are both oppressed and oppressors. In "Gladiators," Essop captures this dual space through the interchange between Mr Rijhumal Rajesperry, the principal of the Tagore Indian High School[4], who upholds White values, and Mr. Rajah, the primary school principal, a "fat satyr of a man, a lover of the flesh of goats and the flesh of fat women" (85), who is the spokesperson of Indian civilization:

> [Ebrahim] "Mr Rajesperry, the whites are oppressors."
> "I am afraid I don't understand you politicians. They are our superiors."
> "We Indians have a culture. What have your superiors?" Mr Rajah asked.
> "Culture? If you call eating foul-smelling curry culture, eating betel leaf and spitting all over culture. . . . Has anyone in India ever invented such a thing as a bicycle, not to speak of an advanced machine like my Citroen? Indians are a lot of unproductive morons. Yahoos!" (87)

This exchange deflates the myth of civilization, a myth which was used by Whites in South Africa to justify first their policies of colonization and later their policies of apartheid. This myth of civilization was also used by Indians

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[3] In the collection, the Coloureds are not clearly placed in this vertical hierarchy and their status, like their identity, remains blurred.
[4] Named after Rabindranath Tagore, an Indian nationalist, writer and Nobel prize winner.

in South Africa to claim a higher status than the Africans, a status equal to the Whites (Ginwala 8). This "consciousness of belonging to an ancient Indian civilization" was partially responsible for the lack of political unity between Indians and Africans.

Focusing on the Indian community in detail enables Essop to further explore their economic and social relationship with the Africans who form part of this community and also inhabit the lowest space in this vertical hierarchy. The Indians with their right to own property and businesses are in a higher economic and social stratum than the Africans. Not only do they hire African servants, but their economic and social clout also creates the possibility of further exploitation. In "Dolly," Dolly accuses Indians of exploiting African women: "If any of you rich Indian bastards try to joll my wife I will put a knife into your guts. What you know is to show off, talk big, ride in your big cars. . . . You Indian dogs, there were not enough bitches in India so you came to South Africa. Now you look for our wives. You lock your wives up and want to joll ours" (37). This is a typical Indian South African stereotype[5] which Essop acknowledges within the collection, but since no actual incident within it supports Dolly's claim, he both acknowledges and negates its possibility.

Although Essop uses this vertical power structure to represent the group status of these races, he further deconstructs these official categories to reveal the complexities within. He reveals that status is not absolutely synonymous with race, but there is also the question of class and gender. Harold in "Black and White" and Gerty in "Gerty's Brother" are Whites, who live in closer

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[5] In Blame Me on History, Bloke Modisane writes: "Indian males . . . will go philandering among African women whilst they keep their own women inviolable, and no degree of sophistication or educational standard will persuade the Indian male from this; this single factor is a major constituent of the conflict between the Indians and the Africans" (213).

proximity to Fordsburg because of their poverty, and are victimized despite their race. This hierarchy of class and gender also pervades the Indian and African communities. By revealing the similarities between these groups, Essop creates the space for inter-racial coalition and for a liberation movement based on race, class, and gender.

Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker ends with "Mr. Moonreddy" in post-Group Areas Lenasia. In depicting resettlement, Essop captures a piece of Indian South African history and his own history as an Indian South African who moved from Fordsburg to Lenasia, a "township 30 km from Johannesburg, already overcrowded, with few roads or amenities, and fewer employment opportunities" (Ginwala 12). The pain of resettlement is portrayed through the barrenness of the setting and the loss of community, racial and/or inter-racial. Significantly, Mr. Moonreddy does not have a family: "[he] was a bachelor and lived with the widow and her ten-year-old daughter in the area mock-humorously called 'Dry Bones' in Lenasia, on account of the rough-and-ready, monotonously homogeneous, rectangular houses and the dusty, rutted roads" (148). Life in Lenasia ends in isolation and tragedy with "Mr Moonreddy entering his room, closing the door, and locking it" (153).

Jayapraga Reddy's On the Fringe of Dreamtime and Other Stories is based in post-Group Areas South Africa. Due to the forced removal and relocation of individual groups to specific areas, Reddy, unlike Essop, does not use a racially mixed township to capture both the specificity of Indian South Africans and the South African diversity. She depicts White, Indian, Coloured, and African townships within and around Durban, Natal. Her collection itself represents the South African space, and within it she

interweaves and alternates multi-racial stories. As Reddy notes: "One derives one's creative spirit from this land of myriad contrasts. There is no "typical" South African way of life. In this collection I have tried to reflect that" ("Foreword" n. pag.). The setting represents her integrative political stance, a stance which was already a political reality for Indian South Africans in post-Group Areas South Africa.

Reddy's collection, like Essop's, is still primarily Indian. However, the structure of her collection does not enable her to create one specific Indian township and community. The Indian township and/or townships are unnamed and they are not inhabited by a fixed community of people. Nevertheless, each story has a community within it and Reddy captures a sense of the Indian South African community. Like Essop's Fordsburg, this is not a homogeneous community, and in her stories Reddy represents Indian South African culture and traditions in all their diversity.

Whereas Essop's collection deals mostly with Muslim Johannesburg, Reddy's deals with Hindu Durban, a difference which reflects their respective faiths and the geographic distribution of Hindus and Muslims in South Africa (Ginwala 5). Instead of the "Newtown Mosque," the "temple" is the centre of cultural activity in Reddy's collection. However, people of Muslim origin are present in the collection and this is reflected in their names. The Muslim names of Zainab, Miriam, Ayesha and Zubeida lie alongside South and North Indian Hindu names like Veeran, Sharda, Rajendra, and Sadhana. Besides presenting religious and provincial differences, the collection also depicts diverse classes and occupations including a barber, a shopkeeper, a teacher, a priest, a businessman, and stall owners in an Indian market.

Although Reddy presents a diverse Indian community, she captures the cultural structures that unite them as a community. Besides the arranged marriage which is examined in detail in "A Time to Yield," she mentions the extended family system in several stories and deals more specifically with its advantages and disadvantages in "The Spirit of Two Worlds." Besides sharing some common cultural traits, primarily a legacy of their origins, Indians share a history in South Africa. Like Essop, Reddy portrays the trauma of resettlement. Describing the effects of the Group Areas Act, Frene Ginwala writes: "Entire communities are uprooted and forced to leave behind not only long established homes and businesses but also schools, temples, mosques, clinics, and community centres . . ." (Ginwala 12). "On the Fringe of Dreamtime" presents an old man's search for his former house in an area claimed for White housing. Through his recollections, the story depicts the painful loss of home, livelihood, and religious and community centers:

> "We lived here for thirty years! The farm, the bananas, such bananas! Then they took it all from us!" . . . . "We had homes! Farms, land, I tell you!" he cried like a man demented. (63-64)

> He paused in front of the old temple. Nothing remained of it now except the ruins from the inner sanctum. He stood there and heard once more the prayers and songs of a thousand devotees. The blackened ruin conjured up the fragrant smoke of incense and fruit offerings. Here he had accompanied his family during festivals and special occasions. At such times, the spirit of sharing and oneness was strengthened. (66)

Resettlement forms a piece of Indian South African history, and this common history binds the Indians together.

The Indian story is placed alongside the story of other races. Placing African and Coloured characters within their own communities and/or townships enables Reddy to present their group identities more fully than does Essop. In her collection, Reddy portrays the African community using their cultural symbols, folk beliefs, and strong sense of kinship. "The Love Beads" is titled after the Zulu love necklace of brightly coloured beads, the "traditional love beads of the African people, which spelt a woman's tenderness, trust, and loyalty" (23). In "The Shadow of Desire," Reddy deals primarily with African folk beliefs: "tales of evil and twisted spirits dwelling in trees" (53), twins bringing "ill luck" (54), and the power of the traditional medicine man. But this does not represent a celebration of a pure African past. Like Reddy's portrayal of Indian cultural beliefs, it is a reassessment and a merging of the old and the new for a new beginning. This is evident in the names of the African people within the collection; alongside Christian names--Jacob, Eunice, and Bessie--lie traditional African names--Tandiwe, Ayanda, and Phumza. Reddy also captures a strong sense of community in these stories, as is evident in Lucy's realization in "A Dream at Sunset": "She was discovering too that there were ties, ties and roots which went very deep. Ties which held her to her people in a common bond, a bond so deep that neither time nor absence could sever it" (88).

Besides sharing common cultural beliefs, the Africans, like the Indians, share a history of oppression. For Africans, the "basic unit of human settlement--the family--is not recognized by the state for residence" and "each individual must qualify as a unit of labour in order to enter the urban areas as migrant or contract labour" (Ginwala 4). Since the collection is based in

Durban, Reddy portrays the loss of family life experienced by migrant and contract labourers. In "The Love Beads," Jacob, a rickshaw puller, is separated from his family in Transkei and is only able to visit them once a month. Similarly, in "The Stolen Hours," Doreen, a maid, gets "two weeks leave. . . . for her yearly visit home in Port St. Johns" (69). This deprivation, among many others, unites them as a group.

Compared to the Africans, the Coloured community that Reddy presents in her collection significantly lacks folk beliefs and a sense of kinship. Although they are a product of two races and cultures, they don't seem to have direct access to either for cultural sustenance. By presenting them in terms of their economic and social status, Reddy captures this cultural displacement. Like the Indians, the Coloureds were victims of the Group Areas Act, and were the focus of forced removal and relocations (Ginwala 12). "Snatch the Wind and Run" is based in the Coloured township of Wentworth "separated" from the "Indian areas" (25). Reddy presents the poverty and grime of the "rooms in the council flats" which are "hot and airless"; the "shoddy lives of its inhabitants" (26); and the singular lack of community. "The Slumbering Spirit" depicts a Coloured township at a time when "the group Areas Act was slowly trying to sort out different races in the interest of separate development," and a "handful of whites" were still living in the neighbourhood (114). Reddy contrasts the poverty and the limited living space of a Coloured family of ten children with the relative comfort of a White woman's lifestyle. But although "The Slumbering Spirit" presents a united family, unlike "Snatch the Wind and Run," both stories lack a sense of a unified and supportive Coloured community.

In Reddy's collection, there are no individual stories of Whites; they are always presented within the stories of other communities. Like the

Coloureds, the Whites are presented in terms of their economic and social place, and this is symbolic of their status within South Africa. Reddy does not present a homogeneous White group, and within the group there is a hierarchy based on class. In "The Stolen Hours" Doreen's employer, Vera Fairley, is a rich housewife, who lives in a big house with a swimming pool, has "seaside' holidays, and wears "three hundred rand dress[es]" (72). "Snatch the Wind and Run" is the story of a White social worker, Barbara Mason, who works among the Coloured community. But in spite of class differences, Whites as a race are in a position of relative power and have a better lifestyle than Indians, Coloureds, and Africans.

In On the Fringe of Dreamtime and Other Stories, by juxtaposing different groups and depicting their interaction in economic and social spaces, Reddy captures the great disparity that exists between Whites and Blacks. Although, the Blacks have a shared history of institutionalized oppression, she further deconstructs Black solidarity to show the hierarchy within: Indians and Coloureds, followed by Africans. Reddy suggests that a movement for change needs to include issues of class and gender, as well as race. This allows a place for everyone, including Whites, in her vision.

Farida Karodia's Coming Home and Other Stories is not grounded in one city like Johannesburg or Durban. This collection is set in the wider space of urban and rural South Africa, and within it Karodia presents different racial groups--Indian, African, Coloured, and White. The stories of these groups are placed next to each other, alternating and interacting in a collection that presents South African diversity.

Karodia's collection is not primarily Indian. It seems that for Karodia, the urgent need to establish Indian South African existence has lessened. Her

earlier novel Daughters of the Twilight, deals entirely with the removal and relocation of an Indian family under the Group Areas Act. In Coming Home, however, only two of the nine stories deal directly with Indian South Africans, but within these stories Karodia captures their specificity and diversity. Throughout the stories, words that signify Indian identity, like sari, glass bangles, betel-nut, ghee, curry, chapati, appear alongside Afrikaans words like *skollies, stoep, dorp,* and *Vreugde.* The stories encompass the primary Indian South African religions, classes and occupations. While "Cardboard Mansions" deals with a Hindu, ex-indentured, labour class family, "Something in the Air" is about a Muslim, *free* Indian, trader family.

In "Cardboard Mansions," through Dadi-Ma's recollections, Karodia retrieves the history of indentured Indians. Dadi-Ma remembers her arrival in Natal, along with her friend Ratnadevi "on the same boat from India to marry two indentured labourers on the sugar-cane fields in Natal" (97). In The Potrait of Indian South Africans, Meer writes that most indentured Indians lived in "shacks" with "internal partitions of wattle and daub, no sewerage and laid-on water supply" (12). Dadi-Ma's recollection of her life in the plantation barracks echoes Meer's description :

> The tenement somehow always reminded Dadi-Ma of the quarters they had once occupied on the sugar-cane plantation. There she and her husband had lived in a barracks with dozens of other workers, separated from the rest by paper-thin walls, or frayed curtains. In summer the windowless barracks were like ovens, and then when the rains came it was like the monsoons in India, lasting for weeks and turning the compound into a quagmire. (99)

These living conditions led to an outbreak of tuberculosis and malaria (Meer 12), and this historical event also becomes part of Dadi-Ma's personal history: "Three of her sons and her husband, like so many of the men who had toiled in the sugar-cane fields, had all died of tuberculosis" (94).

But the story ends with a more contemporary historical event, an event that is common to ex-indentured and free Indians, and other South African races--resettlement. Like Essop and Reddy, Karodia recreates this event by presenting its effect on people. "Cardboard Mansions" ends with Dadi-Ma's wasted journey to Durban to trace her friend Ratnadevi:

> Dadi-ma described the house she was searching for.
>
> "Yes, I remember that one," the woman said. "The house was torn down a long time ago."
>
> "What happened to the people who once lived here?" Dadi-Ma asked.
>
> The woman shrugged and shook her head.
>
> Dadi-Ma sat back, the pain that had nagged her all day numbing her arms, suddenly swelled in her chest. (105)

Dadi-Ma's journey through Durban also partially captures the economic repercussions of resettlement. She mentions the removal of the Indian marketplace to a new location, an event which is revisited in "The Woman in Green." In this story, Moosa, an old shopkeeper, dies soon after his cafe is torn down.

Like Reddy, by placing characters within their own communities and/or townships, Karodia creates a fuller picture of African, Coloured, and White

communities. She presents a heterogeneous African group and the use of African languages within these stories plays an important part in establishing different ethnicities. This diversity is reflected in their names--Treaty Kumalo (Zulu), Ntombi (Xhosa) and Burns Mpangela (Xhosa)--and in African words that frequently appear in these stories--*lambele, thixo, tsak, iNigilani, kaloko* and *buti*. These words, like the Indian words, always appear alongside Afrikaans words establishing the hybridity of South Africa. The stories also portray both rural and urban locations: "Ntombi" is based in a village, "iGoldie" presents both a village and Johannesburg, "the city of gold" (116), and "The Necklace" is based in an African township.

In these stories, Karodia also presents the history of African oppression. In "iGoldie," through Treaty's recollections, she retrieves an important event in African history--the resettlement of Africans in Bantustans, the "traditional homelands" artificially created under "separate development" (Ginwala 10). The moving of villagers to "the homeland" forces Treaty to visit her son, Nathaniel, and his family, in Johannesburg (116). Recalling the event, Treaty primarily focuses on the official justification for the act:

> The mission was no more. The government had taken the land also. They blamed the Africans for all the trouble.
>
> "Too many cattle," they said. "It is destroying the land."
>
> She could see what they meant about the land being destroyed. It washed away in the rain forming deep cracks in the earth. . . .
>
> "This," the men said, fixing them with angry glances, "is due to the ignorance of the natives. Too many cattle," they proclaimed. To correct the situation they returned with guns and shot the cattle.

> "Anyone can see," she told her husband, "it is not a matter of too many cattle but too little land." (117-18)

"iGoldie" is primarily set in Johannesburg, and along with "The Necklace," another urban story, it enables Karodia to depict the state of black townships: the lack of housing and amenities, unemployment, poverty, violence and crime (the *tsotsis),* and the feeling of decay "hovering like a stench of death" ("The Necklace" 90).

Karodia presents the Coloured community in terms of their hybridity and their dilemma of displacement. Although they are a mixture of races, they don't seem to have full access to either culture. In "Coming Home," as Horace, the Coloured protagonist, notes: "It didn't matter whether your name was Simon van der Stel [a Dutch East Indian company commander], if your face was brown, you were still 'his *hotnot,*' or 'a *hotnot*' or just plain '*hotnot*'" (11). They form a community of their own, a mixture of cultures; unlike Reddy, Karodia captures this strong community in her stories. She presents the Coloured community and their history of oppression in two stories, "Coming Home" and "The Woman in Green," the former based in a rural and the latter in an urban location.

"The Coming" is set on an Afrikaner plantation *Driehoek* , and it partially retrieves the history of slavery and also the present living conditions of coloured labour on plantations, conditions which are similar to those of Indian plantation labour. Describing their accommodation, Horace notes:

> Most of the houses had been built more than a hundred years ago when these places were still run by slaves. Our house was like all the others in the quarters. At one time it had been nothing more

> than a windowless box, dark and dank with more than a century's history carved out on the stone walls. Before we fixed it, the roof had consisted of a mixture of thatch and corrugated iron. . . . After all these years the compound was still referred to as the 'coloured quarters' or 'slave quarters.' (47)

Although Karodia presents the oppressive work conditions and lifestyle of Coloured plantation labour, she also captures their strong sense of community, a community that supports and sustains in the time of need. As Horace notes, at Jerry's funeral "the whole community was in attendance, others even came from the neighbouring farms" (62).

"The Woman in Green" is set in a Coloured township in Pretoria. Karodia expands the resettlement theme to include the Coloured community, another group affected by the Group Areas Act: "'People were dispersed--the Indians to Laudium and the Coloureds to Eeersterust'" (171). But along with this retrieval of Coloured history, she captures their fluidity, their capacity to move between cultures, and this hybridity is Karodia's solution to the South African problem.

Unlike Essop and Reddy, Karodia presents individual stories of Whites in her collection; they are not only presented within the stories of other communities, but they also have stories of their own. The White community is presented in terms of power: they are the oppressors in contrast to the oppressed "Black" groups. But the term "White" is further deconstructed to show differences within. The group is broken up in terms of ethnicities--the Afrikaners and the British. This is evident in their names: Afrikaner names, like Koos Kleinhans, Faanie van Staaden and Johan Mulder, contrast with British names--Kathleen Stewart and Beth Stewart.

Karodia further divides these groups in terms of their attitude; she seems to make a distinction between the Afrikaners and the British liberals. In contrast to the British,[6] the Afrikaners are shown in positions of economic and political power: Pik Van der Merwe is a plantation owner ("The Coming"); Faanie van Staaden is the local sergeant of police and also works with the Special Branch Forces ("Something in the Air"); and Johan Mulder is a Deputy Minister in the Free State ("The Woman in Green"). The Afrikaners are shown as more interested in maintaining the hierarchy than the British. But power is not only related to race, and Karodia makes another distinction based on gender. In these stories it is the men, compared to the women, who are in actual positions of power. The only character who doesn't fit into Karodia's hierarchical model is Mrs Ramsbotham, who is in a position of power despite being British and a woman. However, "The World According to Mrs. Ramsbotham" is set strategically in Zambia, and this setting enables Karodia to capture the White woman/Black man hierarchy without destroying her South African model. Karodia's hierarchical representation of the White community seems to be related to the fact that this collection was written in Canada and is aimed primarily at a (White) British and North American audience.

By juxtaposing different groups and depicting their interaction in Coming Home and Other Stories, Karodia captures the great disparity that exists between the status of Whites and Blacks. However, the Blacks remain a homogeneous oppressed group; unlike Essop and Reddy, Karodia does not deconstruct the term "Black" to show the vertical hierarchy within--Coloured, Indian, and African. She partially maintains this

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[6] The only British man shown in a position of economic power is Mr Ramsbotham in "The World According to Mrs Ramsbotham."

oppressor/oppressed opposition by showing the Whites in interaction with different Black groups, but never a Black and Black interaction. Since her collection is primarily aimed at an international audience, Karodia keeps the South African situation simple--White versus Black.

Characterisation

Since change demands both individual growth and collective action within South Africa, Essop, Reddy, and Karodia display an individual/ collective balance in their mode of characterisation. Writing the ordinary, they create individual characters, and not just token "Black" and/or "White" characters in their collections. They deconstruct the binaries to reveal people of different races, ethnicities, classes, age groups, vocations, languages, and religions. The characters themselves are granted a personal history; they are individually delineated and developed within the stories. Within the context of South African literature, such a strong focus on the individual suggests a belief in liberal humanism, with the individual as the essential unit of change. These writers therefore balance this focus with an equal emphasis on the collective. In their stories, Essop, Reddy, and Karodia achieve this balance in four ways: first of all, their characters are both individuals and representatives of their communities; secondly, they are specifically grounded within communities; thirdly, these writers use two methods for character portrayal--a representation of individual interiority (Ndebele, "Rediscovery" 150) and the use of conversation, a "medium of collective encounters" (Vaughan 131); and fourthly, although the stories have chief protagonists, these protagonists are de-centered by the presence of other powerful characters within the story.

In their collections, Essop, Reddy, and Karodia portray individual characters. Unlike characters in writing of the spectacular, these characters are not just "mere ideas to be marshaled this way or that in a moral debate" (Ndebele, "Turkish Tales" 329). They are concrete people with personal histories. Although they are individual people, they are simultaneously representative of their communities. Their history is both personal and communal; it is their own story and the story of their community. An example from Karodia's Coming Home and Other Stories demonstrates the individual/collective nature of these characters. "The Necklace" is a story of Burns Mpangela, an African township drunk. Through his conversations with other members of the community, the readers learn of his past, a past which is responsible for his present alcoholic despair. Burns tells the story of how he lost his job as a driver for Ford to a man in the shebeen who is also a driver:

> "I was driving along Rissik, thinking about how much I'd earned on this trip . . . when *boom*!" he crashed his fist into his open palm. "Some white woman hit me in the rear-end at the light on Rissik Street. I thought the sky had fallen in. I was shaking like a leaf, and so was she until the police came. Damn woman told them that I had stopped at a green light. 'Must be drunk,' she said."
>
> The other man shook his head sympathetically and with his Khaki handkerchief, wiped the perspiration from his bald head.
>
> "All the witnesses came forward. Some white, some black. The Whites say I was in the wrong, the Blacks say she was in the wrong. In the end you know who they believed," Burns said.
>
> The man nodded. "It always happens like that."

> "I was fired on the spot. The whole thing was written in my passbook that I was drunk and driving." He sighed. "I never got another job again." (84)

This storytelling, then, translates his individual experience into a communal experience. As a storyteller, he articulates the collective experiences of his community, "offering to individual persons--readers--the support of the resources of the collective experience" (Vaughan 132).

In all three collections, individual characters are always grounded within a community--the community of the collection and/or the community within the stories itself. In his collection, Essop recreates the Fordsburg community and the individual characters within his stories form part of this larger community. The characters that the readers passingly encounter in one story are also the chief protagonists of another story: Dr. Kamal, who is mentioned in passing in "Haji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker," has already been encountered by the readers as the chief protagonist of "The Betrayal"; Aziz Khan, who appears both in "Two Sisters" and "Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker," is the chief protagonist of "Aziz Khan"; and Gool, who appears in "Aziz Khan," is the chief protagonist of "Labyrinth."

Both Reddy and Karodia do not recreate one specific community in their collections. They present different locales and different racial groups--Indian, African, Coloured, and White. Each story presents a specific racial, ethnic, and urban or rural community, and the protagonists within that story form part of that community. These individual communities are further grounded within the larger community of the collections themselves--the South African community. Placing their characters within specific

communities enables Essop, Reddy, and Karodia to maintain the individual/communal balance in their collections.

In the development and portrayal of their protagonists, all three writers employ two specific modes of characterisation--a representation of individual interiority (Ndebele, "Rediscovery" 150) and the use of conversation, a "medium of collective encounters" (Vaughan 131). The former has been specifically avoided by spectacular literature with its emphasis on the collective. Describing the spectacular, Ndebele writes that "it does not permit inner dialogue with the self " and "will lambast interiority in character portrayal as so much bourgeois subjectivity" ("Rediscovery" 150). According to Ndebele, however, the point is not to avoid individual interiority but to render it concretely. It reveals inner motives and provides space for "the sobering power of contemplation" and "close analysis," which are prerequisites for change ("Rediscovery" 150). In their collections, Essop, Reddy, and Karodia balance this focus on individual interiority with the use of conversation, a "medium of collective encounters," to develop and reveal character (Vaughan 131).

An example from Ahmed Essop's Hajji Musa and Other Stories demonstrates the use of these two modes of characterisation. "The Hajji"[7] is the story of Hajji Hassen, an Indian man, whose brother Karim had "crossed the colour line (his fair complexion and grey eyes serving as passports) and gone to cohabit with a white woman" ten years ago (2). Although Karim had disassociated himself from his family and friends, now that he is "on the verge of death" he wants "to return to the world he had forsaken and to be buried with Muslim funeral rites and in a Muslim cemetery" (2). The story

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[7] "Hajji" is a title given to a Muslim who has completed a pilgrimage to Mecca, a holy spot for Muslims around the world.

primarily deals with Hassen's dilemma of whether he should forgive Karim and accept him back or reject his "plea." This predicament is given an added dimension due to Hassen's recent visit to Mecca to seek "God's pardon for his sins" (3). Essop partially reveals and develops Hassen's dilemma through his conversations with Karim, Karim's wife Catherine, and other members of the Muslim *kutum*. The members of the *kutum* try to persuade Hassen to accept his brother back:

> "Listen to me Hajji," Mr Mia said. Your brother can't be allowed to die among the Christians."
>
> "For ten years he has been among them."
>
> "That means nothing. He still a Muslim."
>
> The priest now gave his opinion. Although Karim had left the community, he was still a Muslim. He had never rejected the religion and espoused Christianity, and in the absence of any evidence to the contrary it had to be accepted that he was a Muslim brother.
>
> "But for ten years he has lived in sin in Hillbrow."
>
> "If he has lived in sin that is not for us to judge."
>
> "Hajji, what sort of man are you? Have you no feeling for your brother?" Mr Mia asked.
>
> "Don't talk to me about feeling. What feeling had he for me when he went to live among the whites, when he turned his back on me?"

> "Hajji, can't you forgive him? You were recently in Mecca."
> This hurt Hassen and he winced. (11)

Although this conversation partly explains Hassen's rejection of his brother's plea, Essop reveals his inner thoughts in order to reveal other motives. Hassen confesses that "By giving in he would be displaying mental dithering of the worst kind, as though he was a man without inner fibre, decision and firmness of will" (11-12). When Karim is moved by the Indian community to Fordsburg and housed "in a little room in a quiet yard behind the mosque" (12), Hassen's inner dialogue with himself further reveals his dilemma:

> In his room he debated with himself. In what way should he conduct himself so that his dignity remained intact? How was he to face the congregation, the people in the streets, his neighbours? Everyone would soon know of Karim and smile at him half sadly, half ironically, for having placed himself in such a ridiculous position. Should he now forgive the dying man and transfer him to his home? People would laugh at him, snigger at his cowardice, and Mr Mia perhaps even deny him the privilege: Karim was now *his* responsibility. And what would Catherine think of him? Should he go away (on the pretext of a holiday) to Cape Town, to Durban? But no, there was the stigma of being called a renegade. And besides, Karim might take months to die, he might not die at all. (12-13)

"The Hajji" ends with Karim's death and Hassen's realization comes too late. He remains an outsider witnessing his brother's funeral: "The green hearse,

with the crescent moon and stars emblem passed by; then several cars with mourners followed, bearded men, men with white skull-caps on their heads, looking rigidly ahead, like a procession of puppets, indifferent to his fate. No one saw him" (18).

Besides the balance between individual interiority and conversation in the works of Essop, Reddy, and Karodia, what further saves their modes of characterisation from becoming trapped in the ethos of liberal individualism is the lack of centrality of the protagonists within the stories. Although each of these stories focuses primarily on one protagonist, the story itself isn't just the protagonist's story. Essop's "The Hajji" contains, in addition to Hassen's story, the stories of Karim, Catherine, and the *kutum* as a whole; Reddy's "A Dream at Sunset" includes the stories of Lucy, her brother Alexander, her father, and her mother; and Karodia's "The Necklace" articulates the story of Burns Mpangela alongside the stories of his daughter Sophy, his wife Victoria, and his friend Gentleman-Jim.

By maintaining a balance between the individual and the collective in their characterisation, Essop, Reddy, and Karodia ensure the involvement of the readers on two levels--an identification with the characters and a simultaneous identification with the community as a whole. This dual identification, makes for a better understanding of the South African situation as a whole, an understanding that is a prerequisite for change.

Theme: Political Visions

In "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary," Ndebele writes: "As the struggle intensifies . . . . every individual will be forced, in a most personal manner, to take a position with regard to the entire situation" (156). In their collections, Essop, Reddy, and Karodia primarily focus on the growth of

individual political consciousness. This focus on individual political growth, then, enables Essop, Reddy, and Karodia to articulate their visions and make a contribution towards political and social change within South Africa. Not only do their stories focus on individual growth, but they also present different strategies for communal interaction and solidarity on a personal (person to person) and/or institutional level (political organizations).

In Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker, Ahmed Essop captures the Indian South African political climate just before the Group Areas legislation. The Fordsburg community that he depicts is fairly insular. They are either apolitical or involved in "The Orient Front," a party founded by Mahatama Gandhi and based on his principle of separatist politics. This is clearly demonstrated in the speech of the president of The Orient Front: "You have great responsibility towards the Indian people of this country. You cannot permit them to be divided. The despots will destroy us if we let this happen" ("The Betrayal" 21). In this collection Essop demonstrates the urgent need to move beyond apolitical or separatist stances and form a coalition with "The People's Movement" ("The Betrayal").

"The Yogi" and "Film" primarily deal with the growth of political awareness in two religious leaders, Hindu and Muslim. Given the importance of religion among Indian South Africans, these stories comment on the attitude of the community as a whole. Both Yogi Krishnasiva, a Hindu religious leader in "The Yogi," and Molvi Haroon, a Muslim religious leader in "Film," want to keep religion separate from politics. Whereas the Yogi preaches that "if you have inner liberty, political liberty is unnecessary," Molvi Haroon backs his belief with a quotation from the Koran: "'The Prophet says in the Koran: "Verily, the life of this world is but play, amusement, mutual pride and the accumulation of wealth and sons.'" Now

is politics not part of the life of this world? Is politics not amusement, mutual pride and the accumulation of wealth?'" (109). However, the stories end with their reconsideration of these value systems. The Yogi ultimately can't seem to transcend politics, when he is caught with a White woman and convicted under the Immorality Act. His recognition that apartheid cannot be transcended comes too late, and the story ends ironically with the judge's injunction to separate politics from justice:

> The next day, before the judgement was delivered, the Yogi asked if he could make a statement. He began: "Your worship, I wish to place on record that I object to this witch-hunt into the affairs of my private life . . ." But the Magistrate interrupted him with the rebuke that the court was not a forum for political speeches. (35)

Molvi Haroon's desire to keep religion separate from politics ruins his attempt to get the film, "The Prophet," banned. In fact, the film is released in Pantheon Cinema and he, along with other religious leaders, ends up inside the theatre:

> On the panoramic screen a procession of Arab horsemen was approaching a desert city. It was met at the entrance gate by the chieftain who led the way to his palace where the riders dismounted. They entered a splendid room where a feast lay spread. While the handsome "Prophet" and his party were feasting, flutes began to play and dancing girls in diaphanous jade silk glided in among the guests . . .. (114-15)

In Essop's vision for change, collective solidarity follows individual consciousness, and "The Betrayal" and "Ten Years" present the need for collective organizations. But they also demonstrate the need to go beyond separatist organizations, as the speaker of The People's Movement points out: "any organization opposed to racialism should not have a racial structure, such as that of the Orient Front, or the African Front . . ." ("The Betrayal" 25). Both these stories signal the end of the Orient Front and the arrival of a multi-racial organization: in "The Betrayal" this is depicted through the arrival and popularity of The People's Movement, an arrival which disrupts The Orient Front; and in "Ten Years," the readers are told that "most of the leaders [of the Orient Front] have now absconded from the country" and Amin, a member of the Orient Front, is convicted for ten years for sabotage. The future seems to lie with Amin's brother, Ebrahim, who is a member of The People's Movement.

Jayapraga Reddy's On the Fringe of Dreamtime and Other Stories is set in South Africa in the 1980's and multi-racial political organizations are already an established fact. She is primarily concerned with creating an understanding between people of different races in their day-to-day interaction. "Snatch the Wind and Run" and "The Slumbering Spirit" focus on this theme of inter-racial friendship and understanding. Both these stories illustrate a move from initial distrust to gradual trust and understanding. "Snatch the Wind and Run" is the story of Gregory, a Coloured boy, accused of trying to murder his father, and Barbara Mason, a White social worker who is thoroughly disillusioned with her job working with Coloureds. During their interaction, Barbara manages to break Gregory's sullen silence and win his trust:

> She went on talking trying to get his mind off things. Somehow she had to get through to him! She had to break down his defences!
>
> Absently, he gulped his tea. At last, he looked up and met her gaze directly.
>
> "I didn't kill him. It was an accident," he said earnestly.
>
> She smiled and leaned across the table and touched his hand reassuringly. (31)

The story ends with mutual regeneration. With the knowledge that he is free to buy his dream bicycle, Gregory feels "a kindling of hope" (35), a "kindling" which gestures towards Barbara's future as a social worker. Maybe she is not in the "wrong place" after all (33).

"The Slumbering Spirit" traces the gradual development of friendship between another Coloured boy, Terry, and an older White woman, Miss Anderson. Their initial racial prejudices are revealed in Miss Anderson's remark to Terry: "'You are so kind, you are so different from the other coloured boys in these parts'" (115), and in Terry's mother's warning: "Now just be careful, Terry. I don't want you getting mixed with the whites. I know them too well" (117). The story presents a move beyond racial biases to an understanding and sustaining friendship which outlasts Miss Anderson's death:

> Miss Anderson had given him [Terry] something, something more precious than anything material. Years later, he was to recognise it for what it really was. But standing there, in the cool night air, with a lift of the heart, he remembered a gentle old woman on a sun warmed step. She had given him time and friendship, and

> something else which his fourteen-year-old mind was too young to analyse. It was awakening, an awakening of the slumbering spirit to mutual sharing and communication and sympathetic understanding. And that was something he would carry with him for a lifetime. (120)

Although Reddy is primarily concerned with racial interaction on a personal level, she also acknowledges the importance of political organizations. In "A Dream at Sunset" through Lucy's recollections, Reddy traces her brother's and her father's dedicated involvement and contribution to the struggle, a struggle that ends in her father's banning and finally his death in police custody and her brother's imprisonment under the Terrorism Act. Although Reddy presents the "inevitable" need for collective involvement, like Essop, she also gestures towards non-violent strategies of resistance: "There is a gentler way of winning freedom" ("A Dream at Sunset" 87).

In Coming Home and Other Stories, Farida Karodia does not portray a specific historical and political time period. Her vision of change includes individual growth and inter-racial communication, on both a personal and an institutional level. The "Seeds of Discontent" and "Something in the Air" deal primarily with the interaction of white middle-class women with active black revolutionaries, a contact which ultimately leads to growth in their political awareness and understanding. In "Seeds of Discontent," Kathleen Stewart, a British South African, comes in contact with Celina, an African revolutionary, and gradually overcomes her racial prejudice as well as her political complacency. When Celina is indicted on five counts of terrorism and later dies in police custody, Kathleen is changed forever: "It seems once

in a while something or someone passes through one's life (sometimes in an unobtrusive way) and after that nothing is ever the same again. That was the effect Celina had on my life" (146). The story ends with Kathleen's active participation in a political rally held following Celina's death.

In "Something in the Air," Elsie, a young Afrikaner girl, takes up the cause of Rashid, an Indian revolutionary. Her stand, like Kathleen's in "Seeds of Discontent," stems from her brief contact with him, a contact which ultimately makes her reconsider her outlook. The first time Elsie meets him near the river, she calls him "coolie" and he laughs:

> "What's so funny?" asked Elsie, offended by his laughter.
>
> "You are. You *Boere* are so ignorant."
>
> "Don't you call me a *Boer*!" she cried stamping her foot.
>
> "Well don't go around calling me a *coolie*."
>
> "But you are one," she said in a small voice, a little unsure of herself now.
>
> "No," he said. "It's a bad word." (71)

This is the beginning of an understanding which later leads Elsie to warn Rashid's parents about the trap being set for him by her father Faanie van Staaden, the local sergeant of police (67): "For a moment she was torn by indecision. Then quite abruptly she made up her mind. Since the trap was set for Wednesday, there would still be enough time to warn their son. Elsie climbed back out of the lorry watched by the surprised Jackson, and hurried back to the store" (80).

In their stories Essop, Reddy, and Karodia present a variety of ways of dealing with the South African situation. As well as active group resistance,

they depict other ways of combating oppression. By presenting individual modes of resistance alongside the collective, these authors validate a wide range of political strategies. This validation encourages both the involvement and transformation of a wide range of readers.

Writing the Ordinary, Essop, Reddy, and Karodia fracture the Black/White binary to firmly establish the presence of Indian South Africans. At the same time, the individual/collective balance in their setting, characterisation, and theme enables them to establish a integrationist political stance. Living on the fringe, these Indian South African writers take a firm stand in favour of a non-racial society based on mutual understanding and love:

> I remember your eyes
> when they spoke of me
> of my race, of my god,
> of the way I danced.
>
> They were not your eyes
> but the eyes of years gone by,
> shaped by sights of images
> too big to see
> and left alone . . .
> in the dark
>
> Those eyes, archaic,
> of years gone by,

had to be plucked,
and in the unwanting sockets
I put mine in yours,
yours in mine.

I remember my eyes now,
when they spoke of you
of your race, of your god,
of the way you danced. (Kriben Pillay, Qtd. in Pereyre)

Kriben Pillay's poem speaks of a necessary mixing of eyes, of viewpoints; a celebration and sharing of images, races and gods, which captures the world vision of Essop, Reddy and Karodia.

Chapter Two

Towards a Womanist Discourse

Introduction

Writing the ordinary allows Ahmed Essop, Jayapraga Reddy, and Farida Karodia to analyze gender issues simultaneously with issues of race. Race solidarity and "race liberation"[1] are fundamental concerns for non-Whites, and they have led to the marginalization of other issues, primarily the issues of gender in South Africa. Since race (White/Coloured/Asiatic/African) has been the primary category of oppression, it has been the primary focus of liberation politics. Racial liberation, the liberation of non-Whites from an oppressive White minority rule, has been seen as the key to national liberation. Although race liberation has been primarily represented through racial solidarity, it is not exclusively race-based. Since "race" in South Africa also signifies economic and social status, race liberation gradually incorporated questions of class.

To begin with, race liberation movements in South Africa were founded and dominated by men, and women had a secondary role. For example, when the African National Congress (ANC), a multi-racial organization, was founded in 1912, women were initially only granted auxiliary membership and were not admitted as full members until 1943. Similarly, the Indian South African resistance movements, both organized and unorganized, were in the hands of men. In 1894 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi founded the Natal Indian Congress, but Indian women participated in large numbers

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[1] Deborah K. King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology," 53.

only in the Satyagraha campaign, 1906-1914 (Bhana 140). Again in the passive resistance campaign of 1946-47, women actively participated: "On 20th June 1946 a group of Indian women, desirous of assisting the struggle met in Durban to form the Women's Action Committee" (Bhana 205). Moreover, studying the statistics of the passive resistance movement, we find that along with the men, "279 women suffered imprisonment" (Bhana 205). Although South African women gradually participated in the national liberation movements, the organizing principle of the ANC and other political parties was race liberation, and women were incorporated to strengthen the fight against racist apartheid.

This politics of race liberation with its emphasis on racial solidarity is clearly visible in South African protest literature. Justifying her primary focus on race, Nadine Gordimer, a South African writer, argues: "It's all based on colour you see . . . the white man and the white woman have much more in common than the white woman and the black woman. . . . The basis of colour cuts right through the sisterhood or brotherhood of sex. . . . Thus the loyalty to your sex is secondary to the loyalty to your race" (Gordimer qtd. in Lazar 101). The discourse of race liberation led to the sidelining of gender politics. If and when gender issues did appear in literature they were granted a secondary status. This marginalization was further entrenched by the spectacular's primary focus on the Black collective. This was a strategy strengthened by Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement, a movement that stressed "the need for black unity in the face of apartheid, the need for political and psychological liberation and self-reliance among black people" (Sole 66). This stress on racial solidarity did not allow for the creation of a space for the articulation of gender issues in literature.

Even today in South Africa, gender issues continue to be subordinated to issues of race. In "'A Bit on the Side'? Gender Struggles in the Politics of Transformation in South Africa," Jo Beall, Shireen Hassim, and Alison Todes argue that there is a "dominant position in South Africa which sees women's struggles as necessarily subsumed under national struggles. Apartheid is seen as the prime enemy and its abolition as the major political task" (32). They further add that "this position argues that women are drawn into the organization on the basis of their opposition to racism in its various forms. Hence they are seen to have 'communal' interests with men" (33). The major issue is apartheid and national liberation, and as a result fighting 'women's issues' is denounced as divisive and detracting from the struggle (Beall, Hassim, and Todes 33). This viewpoint is clearly demonstrated in a speech by Mavis Nhalpo, a representative of the ANC women's secretariat: "In our society women have never made a call for the recognition of their rights as woman, but always put the aspirations of the whole African and other oppressed people of our country first" (qtd. in Kimble 13).

However, Kumari Jayawardena argues that "women's struggles rarely detract from national struggles" (qtd in Beal, Hassim, and Todes 47), and they should not be subordinated in resistance movements because race liberation does not automatically ensure gender liberation. As we learn from history, "in a number of post-revolutionary countries, where women have been crucially involved in the struggle, their visions of gender equality are not realized either in the political or economic level" (Beall, Hassim, and Todes 47). Even in post-revolution South Africa, women would still have to deal with the problems of Black patriarchy, a system (when exacerbated by apartheid) which reproduces the hierarchy of White/Black as Black man/Black woman in the domestic sphere. This need for women's liberation

is partially reflected in some women's movements within South Africa, movements which have existed alongside and separate from race movements. In 1954, a national body, the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) was formed, and it was composed of organized groups of women such as the ANC Women's League (Cock 151). At the inaugural conference a Women's Charter was adopted "for solidarity in struggle against apartheid racism, sexism and economic exploitation" (Cock 151). On 9 August 1956 there was an anti-pass demonstration by 20,000 women, protesting the extension of passes to African women. Women have also participated in the boycott of beer halls and the Bantu Education system (Cock 151), issues that directly affected them and their children. Stressing the importance and urgent need for gender equality within South Africa, Dora Tamane, an 80-year-old member of FEDSAW, writes:

> Let us share our problems so that we can solve them together.
> We must free ourselves.
> Men and women must share housework.
> Men and women must work together in the home and out in the world.
> There are no crèches and nursery schools for our children.
> There are no homes for the aged.
> There is no-one to care for the sick.
> Women must unite to fight for these rights.
> I opened the road for you.
> You must go forward. (qtd. in Kimble 33)

Moreover, "at the level of national politics, it is being acknowledged that liberation will not have been achieved if women do not perceive themselves to be free and full members of the new society" (Daymond v). As Samora Machel, President of the People's Republic of Mozambique, said: "The emancipation of women is not an act of charity . . . The liberation of women is a fundamental necessity for the revolution, the guarantee of its continuity and the preconditions of its victory" (qtd. in Lockett 21).

By focusing on everyday life, the "ordinary" creates the space to bring up gender issues in South African literature, without undercutting race loyalties. But what literary theory is suitable to analyze these issues?[2] Feminism, in its White, middle-class permutation, is not the answer. Frene Ginwala has argued that "focusing on issues of women in their narrowest sense implies African women must fight so that they can be equally oppressed with African men" (qtd. in Beall, Hassim, and Todes 32). The South African Black woman has to deal with "the multiple jeopardies of race and class, and not the singular one of sexual inequality" (King 58). Defining a womanist, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi writes, "she will recognize that, along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations into her philosophy" (64). In this chapter, I argue that writing the ordinary, these Indian South African writers use womanism, a "multiple consciousness," to address simultaneously the "multiple jeopardies" of race, class, and sexual inequality.

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[2] The whole issue of Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa 2 (1990) is devoted to this question.

Womanism: An Assertion of Difference

> **Womanist** 1. From *womanish* . (Opp. of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or *willful* behaviour.
>
> -Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*

The term "womanism" has become synonymous with Alice Walker, but Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, a Nigerian woman writer, also coined the term. In "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English" (1985), she informs readers, "I arrived at the term "womanism" independently and was pleasantly surprised to discover that my notion of it overlaps with Alice Walker" (72). Womanism, like feminism, is not a single monolithic entity; there are womanisms as there are feminisms. Establishing a connection between "black America" and "black Africa" Ogunyemi writes: "womanists explore past and present connections between black America and black Africa. Like amiable co-wives with invisible husbands, they work together for the good of the people" (74). She further adds:

> African and Afro-American women writers share similar aesthetic attitudes in spite of the factors that separate them. As a group they are distinct from white feminists because of their race, because they have experienced the past and present subjugation of the black

> population along with present-day subtle (or not so subtle) control exercised over them by the alien, Western culture. (74)

Ogunyemi's concept of womanism is limited to Black women and particularly African Black women ("third world"), but Walker's definition seems to be particular as well as universal: "A black feminist or feminist of color." It covers a variety of contexts: from African-American to Indian South African.

The simultaneous coining of "womanism" by a Black woman in America and a Black woman in Africa indicates not only the necessity of an alternative term for feminists of color but also its necessity for "third world" women. But why is there a need for a new term different from feminism? There is "a Eurocentric view," as Kumari Jayawardena writes, that

> the movement for women's liberation is not indigenous to Asia or Africa, but has been a purely West European and North American phenomenon, and that where movements for women's emancipation . . . have arisen in the Third world, they have been merely imitative of Western models. (qtd. in Owusu, 341)

In this view "third world" women have to be provided with a movement from the West. The "native women" have to be told what is right for them, in fact, not only told but spoken for. As Karl Marx puts it, "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented" (qtd. in Said). The power of Western interpretation results in "native women" being completely silenced. Western White middle-class feminisms become another form of

colonization. Marnia Lazreg sees it not so much as a reproduction of the colonial power structure but as a reproduction of "the power of men over women . . . in the power of women over women . . ." (97).

However, indigenous women's movements have existed in the "third world." In order to resist colonization, their silencing and the obliteration of their identity, "native women" have to find their own voices, both oral and written. As Dabi Nkululeko stresses,

> The programme for [black women's] transformation from the dependent, unskilled, weak-bodied and weak-minded creatures . . . must be determined by them. Their own experience can be aided by their own efforts to do research and recommend a programme for their own liberation based on their findings rather than on what others think. (qtd. in Maqagi, 24)

Womanism, which is not simply based on an imitation of Western models, but grows out of specific social, political, economic, religious and cultural conditions, provides a "third world" resistance to the Western system of totalizing, naming, and controlling. It enables Black women to represent their own selves, simultaneously resisting years of mis-representation. As Antigone Kefala puts it: "To find our measure, exactly / not the echo of other voices (qtd. in Reuck, 30).

The choice of the specific term "womanism" is partly due to the analogy between race and sexual oppression which has, ironically, made the experiences of Black women invisible. Deborah K. King traces the beginning of this analogy to 1860 and to Elizabeth Cady Stanton's observation that

"Prejudice against color of which we hear so much, is no stronger than against sex" (43). Scholars in various disciplines have drawn this analogy; for example, sociologist Helen Hacker and historian William Chafe have both noted "that unlike many ethnic groups, women and blacks possess ineradicable physical attributes that function systematically and clearly to define from birth the possibilities to which members of a group might aspire" (qtd. in King). This analogy has been used by feminists as a powerful means of conveying woman's subordinate status and mobilizing women and men for political action. However, although it has had its use, it has been widely critiqued by Black writers for being exploitative and racist. According to Ogunyemi, this analogy trivializes black subordination (68). King argues,

> The analogy obfuscates or denies what Chafe refers to as "the profound substantive differences" between blacks and women. The scope, both institutionally and culturally, and the intensity of the physical and psychological impact of racism is qualitatively different from that of sexism. . . . This is not to argue that those forms of racial oppression [King specifies "slavery and lynching for blacks, genocide for Native Americans"] are greater or more unjust but that the substantive differences need to be identified and to inform conceptualizations. (45)

In this analogy, King continues, the "experience of black women is apparently assumed, though never explicitly stated, to be synonymous with that of either black males or white females; and since the experiences of both are equivalent, a discussion of black women in particular is superfluous"

(45). This analogy has led to the invisibility of Black women, as Bell Hooks points out:

> No other group in America has so had their identity socialized out of existence as have black women. We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from black men, or present part of the larger group 'women' in this culture . . . when black people are talked about the focus tends to be on black men; when women are talked about the focus tends to be on white women. (qtd. in King 45)

The "woman" in womanism thus acknowledges their existence as Black women.

This acknowledgment puts them in further jeopardy, as it calls into question their loyalty to either race or gender. The choice of the term "woman," then, also arises from the pressing choice that many women of color feel obliged and forced to make between ethnicity and femaleness, but as Trinh T. Minh-ha argues:

> how can they? You never have / are one without the other. The idea of two illusorily separated identities, one ethnic, the other woman (or more precisely female), again partakes in the Euro-American system of dualistic reasoning and its age-old divide-and-conquer tactics. Triple jeopardy means here that whenever a woman of color takes up a feminist fight, she immediately qualifies for three possible "betrayals": she can be accused of betraying either man (the "manhater"),

> or her community ("people of color should stay together to fight racism"), or woman herself ("you should fight first on the women's side"). (104)

The adoption of the term "woman" by women of color asserts that they are both female and colored simultaneously, that the two cannot be separated, and consequently their future is related to their particular circumstances. As West puts it: "I ain't the right kind of feminist / I'm just woman." In order to be the "right kind of feminist" she would have to break with Black men and the very culture that supports them both. This choice, then, also deconstructs the assumption that goes with being female, that since they are female they must be oppressed by males. This is not to deny that they are oppressed by men, both White and non-White, but to assert that they also have a lot in common with their own men. They have a bond that stems from their common oppression on racial grounds, and also a "common bond that ties men and women of different cultures together," providing them with a support network (Lazreg 99).

But why "woman"? One of the frequently offered reasons is that it "underwrites the resulting preference for *femaleness* at the expense of *femininity*" as in feminism (Owusu 341). However, according to Cheryl L. West, "woman" is a term used for coloured women: "I am a woman / You are a lady." Since the word woman has historically been applied to them, it seems "natural" to opt for the term "woman." But Alice Walker, adding further urgency to the choice, argues:

> It is, apparently, inconvenient, if not downright mind straining, for white women scholars to think of black

> women as women, perhaps because "woman" (like "man" among white males) is a name they are claiming for themselves, and themselves alone. Racism decrees that if they are now women (years ago they were ladies, but fashions change) then black women must perforce, be something else. (While they were "ladies," black women could be "women," and so on). (376)

Sojourner Truth clarifies why it is "downright mind straining" for White women and men to see coloured women as "woman." It is profoundly difficult to see the woman, that is breasts and / or vagina, in someone who has "never been helped into carriages, lifted over ditches, nor given the best places everywhere," who has "plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns," and one who has further claimed: "Look at me! Look at my arm . . . and no man could head me--and *ar'nt I a woman* !" (qtd. in Trinh, 100).

The term "womanism" also has strong associations with motherhood. Womanists celebrate childbirth and motherhood. A distinction should be made between the role of mothers and the status of mothers. While in "womanism" the role of a mother is celebrated, the general "Euro-feminist view of motherhood" is that it is "a condition of passivity and confinement" (Wicomb 37) . Challenging this feminist view West writes: "Girl what are you talking about / I can have kids / My people have always had kids." Trinh Minh-ha argues further that:

> Motherhood as lived and celebrated by women often has little to do with motherhood as experienced by men. The mother cannot be reduced to the mother-hen, the wet-nurse, the year-round-cook,

> the family maid, or the clutching, fear-inspiring matron. Mother of God, of all wo/mankind, she is role free, non-Name, a force that refuses to be fragmented but suffocates codes. (Trinh 38)

Womanists also recognize that mothers have an important role to play in the upbringing of their children. They recognize that women and children are similar in that they are both oppressed by White and Black patriarchy, and the children have to be nurtured and protected by their mothers in order to ensure both a breaking out of the vicious cycle and a better future for the following generation.

Motherhood also implies a desire for a home and a family, and Black women, both in America and Africa, due to slavery and/or colonization have traditionally been denied this right. Focusing on the South African context, Zoe Wicomb writes: "in the context of Apartheid laws, the notions of home, motherhood, and the family have become constructs characterised by desire" (39). She further argues that whereas White women have identified home, motherhood, and family as the sites of their oppression and have sought liberation outside the home, women in South Africa point to the destruction of "normal family" life as one of the most grievous crimes of apartheid (39). The celebration of childbirth and motherhood, then, becomes both a way of fulfilling this desire, and a form of resistance against the dismantling of their home and family.

Establishing a matrilineal heritage seems to be another important reason for choosing the term "womanism." Walker constantly refers to the heritage established by her "grandmothers and mothers," naming her womanist prose collection *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. One aspect of her definition of a womanist is that she "appreciates and prefers women's culture

. . ." (xi). It is only through a matrilineal heritage that Walker can manage to both rescue "women's culture" and entrench it. Similarly establishing a strong connection with powerful foremothers, Miriam Tlali, a Black woman writer, states:

> I think South African black women are very strong. I, for one, have had a very strong grandmother, and then my own mother. . . . There was so much similarity between our lives as women, as people who grew up with the guidance of older women, who were very central in our lives. (Lockett, Between The Lines 74)

This celebration of "powerful foremothers" is also a celebration of the "very strong black female support that exists in many black sex/gender systems" (Cock 11). In the South African context "these female support networks function as strategies of survival; they are of inestimable value to the women coping with the strain of their dual roles as mothers and workers" (Cock 11). Womanists both validate and celebrate this support; they celebrate and propagate a friendship between women. In her definition of a womanist, Walker includes: "a woman who loves other women sexually and/or non-sexually." She, unlike Ogunyemi, acknowledges hetero-sexism or homophobia as another significant oppression, an oppression that has to be dismantled along with those of race, class, and gender.

This multi-faceted women's movement, womanism, has been widely critiqued for being separatist. Preferring feminism to womanism in the context of "third world" women's movements, Cheryl Johnson-Odim contends: " [womanism] runs the risk of losing sight of the fair amount of

universality in women's oppression" (316). The purpose of womanism is not a denial of the "fair amount of universality in women's oppression"; instead it uses the singular/universal model. Walker argues that it is "[n]ot separatist, except periodically, for health," and she further identifies it as "traditionally universalist" (Walker xi). Womanism is "periodically separatist" because it arises indigenously from a particular set of circumstances, and it is "traditionally universalist" because the liberation of all women, irrespective of race, class, and sexual preference, is ultimately linked together. Fannie Lou Hamer, the daughter of sharecroppers and a civil rights activist in Mississippi, commenting on the special plight and role of Black women, wrote 350 years ago: "You know I work for the liberation of all people because when I liberate myself, I'm liberating other people . . . her [the White women's] freedom is shackled in chains to mine, and she realizes for the first time that she is not free until I am free" (qtd. in King 43). Womanists, then, work for the liberation of all women. They aim for a community where people of all races, classes, sexes, and sexual preferences can live together in harmony: womanism "is committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female" (Walker xi).

Womanism in the South African Context

In South Africa, with the recognition of the importance of gender liberation for national liberation, gender and the question of how to free social roles of their ancient inequalities become part of the national debate (Daymond iii). Given the close connection between writing and politics in South Africa, and the fact that writing is a mode of active political

intervention, writers take up these issues. Current Writing: Text and Reception in South Africa (October 1990) is devoted to finding which feminist literary theories--French, American, or English--are suitable for dealing with gender issues in South African writing, and which are being espoused in the writings themselves. In their writing, Essop, Reddy, and Karodia seem to espouse womanism, a theory of black feminists or feminists of colour, as a way of analyzing gender issues in their entirety. In "Feminism[s] and Writing in English in South Africa," Cecily Lockett points out that "[w]ithin the South African context, where any critical paradigm must necessarily focus on issues of race and gender, being a feminist means giving emphasis to gender politics within the framework of a struggle for a more equitable society" (Lockett 1). Womanism, with its balance of race, gender, and class, makes space for this articulation.

Given that a feminist movement "which claims a degree of sisterhood amongst women may not be of immediate service to all aspects of liberation in South Africa," South African women have to question "every imported argument and strategy, both for its validity and its probable local effect " (Daymond ii). Womanism, which is not premised on universal sisterhood and moreover derives from Africa and Afro-America, seems to be more appropriate than feminism to the South African context. More importantly, as King argues: "Black women should take charge of their own experiences and [their] interpretation of [their] own realities at the conceptual and ideological level" (King, qtd. in Maqagi 24), in order to "determine the structures, the meanings of their lives" (Maqagi 24). Womanism is a movement for and by black women. This is the literary/cultural theory which comes out of the historical, political, social, and economic reality of black women, who, in apartheid South Africa, are at the very bottom of the

scale. Describing the status of black women, Ogunyemi argues: "Black women are disadvantaged in several ways: as blacks they, with their men, are victims of a white patriarchal culture; as women they are victimized by black men; and as black women they are victimized on racial, sexual, and class grounds by white men" (67). In South Africa, where races are arranged in a vertical structure, Black women, along with their men, are also oppressed by White women, and by men and women of other races who are higher up in the economic scale. The Black women in South Africa are, using Deborah King's term, victims of "multiple jeopardies. " Arguing for the term "multiple jeopardies" rather than one based on numbers, for example "triple jeopardy," King writes:

> This simple incremental process does not represent the nature of black women's oppression but, rather, I would contend, leads to non-productive assertions that one factor can and should supplant the other. For example, class oppression is the largest component of black women's subordinate status, therefore the exclusive focus should be on economics. Such assertions ignore the fact that racism, sexism, and classism constitute *three, interdependent control systems.* (italics mine, 47)

Multiple jeopardy politics requires a "multiple consciousness" (King 69), and liberation cannot be achieved by prioritizing one issue over another. All these issues need to be raised simultaneously, and King suggests an interactive model, in which sometimes "race might be a more significant predictor of Black women's status; in others gender or class may be more influential" (48). The result is a multifaceted women's movement, which

melds "diverse ideologies, from race liberation, class liberation, and women's liberation" (King 71), a movement that ensures the simultaneous questioning of imperialism, racism, sexism, and classism.

This simultaneous questioning is reflected in the way Essop, Reddy, and Karodia structure their narratives. As Indian South Africans, these writers occupy a space of multiple jeopardies which results in their multiple consciousness. In South Africa, Indians are victims in relation to their non-white status but also victimizers in relation to their economic status. Further, Indian society (as represented in these collections) is highly patriarchal. It is organized on the basis of the extended family system and the *kutum*--both are hierarchically arranged by male seniority. Although these systems serve as a protection from racism, due to their patriarchal nature, a nature which is further strengthened due to racism, it is doubly oppressive for the women in the community. Working with this multiple awareness and writing the ordinary, Essop, Reddy, and Karodia establish a womanist discourse in their works. As non-white South Africans, as "third world" subjects, and as "feminist[s] of colour," they question and critique imperialism, racism, classism, and sexism both within and without their community.

Ahmed Essop's Hajji Musa and the Hindu-Firewalker

In Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker, Ahmed Essop writes the ordinary, and by "adopting an analytical approach to reality" (Ndeble), he writes womanist prose which interrogates the social text of apartheid and writes a space for the eradication of White and Black patriarchy. Although the collection is based in a fairly insular Indian township, it is set in a period prior to the Group Areas Act and Essop presents the South African reality both

within and without the community. He captures it through the eye of an all-encompassing narrator/character who maps the workings of apartheid on men and women, and the workings of apartheid and Black patriarchy together and/or separately on women and children.

This narrator/character functions at two levels in The Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker. First, he is referred to as "I," an "I" who is relatively gender/class/race neutral, throughout the collection. This grants objectivity to the entire narrative, since the "I" is an observer who is never specifically grounded (we never have a concrete picture of him), and it also enables the "I" to be in a whole range of places both private and public. As a result, the "I" captures the workings of apartheid on entire people and provides the reader with an insight into the workings of White and Black patriarchy--a system in which both men and women collude.

Secondly, the narrator/character is identified as Ahmed, an Indian Muslim man ("Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker" 56). Since we don't know anything about him except his name, he is both Ahmed, an Indian Muslim man, and a representative of the entire Indian male community and Indian community. Ahmed is able to specifically critique Black patriarchy through his role as narrator/character. Given the male narrator, it is not suprising the majority of the stories in the collection are about men rather than women. The women have few individual stories of their own (as is clear from the titles of the stories), and herstories are subsumed to histories. Not only are most of the stories about men, but herstories are always negotiated through the male gaze of Ahmed. Essop uses this gaze symbolically to represent the patriarchal structure.

Ahmed's critique of Black patriarchy is reflected in his language, descriptions, and insights. With these he captures both male stereotypical

attitudes and the attitudes of a patriarchal community. In "Dolly," describing Myrtle, Dolly's wife, Ahmed writes:

> Myrtle was a blowsy woman, tall, frizzy-haired, with thrusting buttocks. She believed in the attractiveness of her body and she flaunted it: one would also see her sitting on a balustrade, her legs daringly outstretched . . . or dancing, her thighs and mons Veneris embalmed in tight-fitting slacks . . .. She was often abusively referred to by women as that "Bushman bitch." (37-38)

Moreover, Ahmed appears throughout the collection as both a passive observer and an active participant. In "Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker" he is a neutral bystander along with the community, the "we" who stand and watch while the Hajji practices the so-called traditional religious medicine on Jamilla:

> We removed our shoes and sat down on the carpet. Jamilla was made to sit in front of the grate. . . . His [Hajji's] wife came into the room with a steel tray and a pair of tongs. Then he scattered the red chillies over the coals. . . . He pressed Jamilla's head over the tray and at the same time recited from the Koran in a loud voice. Jamilla choked, seemed to scream mutely and tried to lift her head, but Hajji Musa held her. (61)

In fact, the Hajji's practice is criticized by Aziz Khan, one of the experts on Islam within the community itself: "The primitive ape is prostituting our religion with his hocus-pocus. He should be arrested for assault" (61). But

nothing is done and instead of going to the White police as decided earlier, the community remains a silent accomplice to the crime: "It's not our business" (62). Besides being a silent observer, Ahmed is also an active participant in the oppression of women, and in "Two Sisters" he takes advantage of the two sisters, Rookeya and Habiba, along with his friend Omar:

> Soon Omar and I were making love to the two sisters. I took the younger, Habiba. There was no real selection on our part: we gravitated towards them and indulged in some light-hearted love-making. . . . After some time Omar and I tired of the company of the two sisters. Free of us they hitched themselves to other men. (41)

The narrator/character thus enables Essop to capture the oppressiveness of patriarchy, its different facets, its participants, and the different ways of condoning it--neutrality, silence and participation.

Focusing on apartheid in the collection, Essop does not represent it symbolically as an evil Boer but as a system that pervades everyday lives. His focus is on the psychological impact of apartheid and its effects on gender relations--inter-racial and intra-racial. This approach enables him to analyze both the workings of apartheid and patriarchy simultaneously. One of the greatest legacies of apartheid is the colour complex: the desire to be White. This is a legacy that haunts almost all colonized subjects, and by analyzing why and how it manifests itself, Essop deconstructs the negative colonial stereotype that "the darker races are physically attracted by the fairer" (Forster 222).

In South Africa, whiteness equals status--political, social, and economic--and this status is partially justified through the myth of civilization and progress. The colonized buy into this myth; for example, Mr. Rajespery in "The Gladiators" firmly believes that "They [Whites] are civilized" (86) and "They are our superiors" (87). As apartheid manifests itself, skin colour becomes representative of status: the lighter you are, the higher you are in this vertical hierarchy. In the non-White colonized subject, a strong desire towards whiteness, both in body and in trappings, is engendered. Habiba and Rookeya in "Two Sisters" have "dyed blonde" hair and they wear "western clothing" (40). In "The Gladiators," Mr. Rajesberry is accused of using Elizabeth Arden's complexion creams to achieve a "white result" (86); "his middle-aged body . . . [is] at all times spruce and smelling of perfume and after-shave lotion" (84); moreover, his car is a "a black Citroen ("a car in advance of its time") . . . polished to mirror's gloss by his white-clad servant Anna" (84); and he further achieves whiteness through constant social association with Whites.

But it is only through an inter-racial sexual relationship that you can get closest to being White. As Fanon points out, it is only when a Black man is loved by a White woman, he achieves whiteness:

> I am loved like a white man.
> I am a white man.
> Her love takes me onto the noble road that leads to total realization.
> . . . I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness.
> When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp civilization and dignity and make them mine. (Black Skin, White Masks, 63)

In "The Gladiators" Mr. Rajesperry refuses to marry an Indian woman: "Are you suggesting that I terminate my single state by marrying an Indian Yahoo? The day I marry, I shall marry a white woman" (83). In "Dolly," the story of an African man, Ahmed notes the transformation in Dolly's behaviour with the arrival of Bibi: "She was the most beautiful woman to set foot in our suburb. Black haired and blue-eyed (she was the offspring of an Indian father and a Dutch mother) with a complexion like the white flower of the gardenia" (38). Dolly's behaviour undergoes a radical transformation: "he no longer roamed the streets Caliban-like" (38).

In South Africa White women are more than a symbol of culture and civilization alone; they are also symbolic of class, wealth, power, and status. Indian women in some degree have the same status for African men. In "Obsession," discussing Indian woman, Gool tells Milo, one of his African associates, that "'They're expensive, unlike your women who are bought with cattle. / [Milo] 'Expensive?' / [Gool] 'Gold'" (116). Indian women become symbols of both culture and status and Milo's desire for both is revealed in his visits to the cinema to watch Indian movies:

> Going to the lyric cinema had a double attraction for Milo. There was firstly the attraction of the female cinema-goers. He would gaze at the richly attired women smelling of exotic perfumes . . . hair either coiffured or hanging in tresses. . . . Then there was the attraction of the film itself. Though he failed to understand the language or the plot, he feasted visually on the gorgeous film stars, their garments taut against their bodies, and jewellery embellishing their necks, wrists, and ankles. (117)

When he goes home his wife cannot measure up to his expectations:

> Yet after the film was over. . . . He would drive his car homewards, pass by drab barracoon-type houses, go through muddy roads skirted by dirt and poverty, and look at the women dressed in dull coarse skirts and shapeless smocks. When he reached home he would survey his wife with latent scorn as though she were an Amazon, his mind still ablaze with the feminine world of the cinema. (117)

As a result, "a sense of injustice at the scheme of things, and of his own unblazoned place in it, would overwhelm him" (118).

This desire for whiteness is not limited to men, and women, like men, buy into this myth. In "Red Beard's Daughter" Julie refuses to marry Ben Areff because of his colour and race: he is the product of an Indian man and a African woman "at home neither in an Indian world nor an African world" (101). Similarly, in "Obsession" none of the Indian women ever returns Milo's greetings: "As he drove past, he would greet the Indian women walking along the pavements or standing on balconies, but none of them ever bothered to return his greetings" (116). In "Black and White," Shireen, significantly the daughter of a widow, buys into the White myth. This is represented through her clothes, her "daringly short" skirts and "tight" trousers, and her liaison with a White boy named Harold whose chief attraction is that he is "white" (90).

However, Shireen's reasons for this relationship are a little different. She sees it not as a way of attaining status, given that Harold is "a poor

white" from Mayfair (91), but as revenge, and she constantly humiliates him:

> [Shireen] "Must I go with him, boys?"
> "Where?"
> [Shireen] "To the bushes near the zoo."
> "And do what there?"
> [Shireen] "Behave like a white monkey!"
> We hissed and booed.
> "He is a low beast," Idris said.
> "Don't call him a low beast." Shireen said in mock anger.
> "I said his motor-cycle is a lovely beast." (92)

She displaces the stereotypes normally associated with non-Whites (for example "monkey" and "beast") on to Whites. Her final insult to this hero "from the gutters of Mayfair" (93) is a clear reversal of a common apartheid sign--"Blacks not allowed":

> [Shireen] "Boys, give me us a kiss! Boys, give us a kiss!"
> And we kissed her.
> [Shireen] "I belong to everybody, you understand. That is to blacks only, black boys only. Whites not allowed." (93)

Whether it is a result of blind adoration and/or revenge, this attitude to inter-racial relationships is extremely damaging, and suffering is not limited by the parameters of colour. In "Black and White" Harold's suffering on the basis of class deconstructs the simple binary of White/Black, oppressor/

oppressed. However, although this story destabilizes the binary, "Black and White" does argue that ultimately women are the worst affected due to their gender. Shireen suffers more than Harold, she suffers actual physical violence:

> Then she crossed the street and went towards Harold to apologize to him.
>
> And a little later we heard a scream followed by the roar of a motor-cycle. We ran towards the shoe store and found Shireen lying huddled in the doorway recess. She was crying and had blood on her mouth. (94)

This desire to be White also has repercussions in intra-racial relationships and always manifests itself in violence towards women. In "Dolly" both Bibi and Myrtle, Dolly's wife, suffer. Dolly's worship of Bibi enrages Myrtle: "Because she has white skin and blue eyes she thinks she is someone great" (39). Myrtle gets even by physically assaulting Bibi, but her "bruised cheek, her inflamed eye, her nail scratched neck" (39) arouse Dolly's rage and he assaults Myrtle in return:

> that day hideous screams reverberated through the streets as Dolly, in a rampant mood, took Myrtle into the house and turned on her with his fists . . .. At last Myrtle stopped howling.
>
> Dolly unlocked the door and saw Bibi amongst us. He burst into wild laughter.
>
> "Beauty! Beauty! Come inside. She will never touch you again."

> He took Bibi by the hand and we followed them into the house. (39)

Violence becomes a way of asserting manhood, a manhood that has been lost under apartheid.

Violence becomes even more oppressive for women when combined with traditionalism to justify it. In the face of emasculation, the men recreate the White/Black power structure in the domestic space and in the communal space, and use traditional values as justification. In "Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker" the traditional medicine man derives his power only from within the community: "'What are doctors of today,' Hajji Musa said, biting into a large slice of cake, 'but chancers and frauds? What knowledge have they of religion and spiritual mysteries?'" (55). With the support of the community he goes on to cure Jamilla of the "evil jinn"[3] which possesses her (60). In order to do so, he holds her face over burning pieces of coal on which he scatters red chillies. Describing it the narrator writes: "We heard Jamilla screaming and returned quickly to the room. We saw Hajji Musa and the two brothers beating her with sandals and holding her face over the coals." The exorcism ends with a "sobbing" Jamilla and Hajji's victorious claim: "'See,' said the victorious man, 'it was the evil jinn that was thrashed out of her body. He is gone!'" (62). The "jinn" is symbolic of apartheid and this public exorcism, then, is an exorcism of the powerlessness of the community. This reconstruction of the patriarchal community is written on the body of a sixteen-year-old girl, Jamilla.

However, this story also clearly demonstrates the collusion of women in the Black patriarchal system. They come to occupy the patriarchal space as

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[3] According to Laleh Bakhtiar in Sufi: Expressions of the Mystic Quest, "Jinn are the hostile forces of nature, still not subdued by man" (qtd. in Freed 13).

they grow older, and are gradually empowered. Consequently, they seem to ensure its continuance. This continuance acquires further urgency as their traditional way of life is gradually being eroded under apartheid. In "Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker," Jamilla's "sickness" is caused by her mother-in-law: "She married her cousin a few years ago. But things went wrong. Her mother-in-law disliked her" (59). Even when she comes to be treated by the Hajji, she comes surrounded by women in a car, preceded by the men--her brothers--in another car. When she refuses to leave the car and is dragged by the Hajji, the women abuse her:

> He put his foot into the interior of the car, gripped one arm of the terrified Jamilla and smacked her twice with vehemence. "Come out jinn! come out jinn!" he shouted and dragged her towards the door of the car. The woman beside Jamilla pushed her and punched her on her back. (60)

This collusion is carried over to the ritual, as "several women" seat "themselves near her [Jamilla]" during the ritual and the Hajji's wife assists him in his practice (61). Moreover, throughout the torturous practice, the women remain silent and form a seamless community with the men, united in collusion.

This collusion between men and women in "The Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker" is further demonstrated in "Two Sisters." The two sisters, Habiba and Rookeya, have to leave because of their stepmother's influence over their father: "He don't listen to us any us since he marry dat woman. He very nice man, but when he marry dat woman all niceness

disappear" (40). When Habiba and Rookeya get pregnant the woman are far more outraged than the men, and they become the upholders of morality:

> "Fine example they set our young girls" said Mrs. Musa to my landlady. "Can't they see I have growing girls."
>
> "Lucky I got no girls to worry about."
>
> "I must tell my husband to do something. I cannot go on living alongside two pregnant and unmarried women. And my eldest is so friendly with them."
>
> Mrs. Cassim, who was half-Chinese said : "My mother used to tell me that in China unmarried girls never become pregnant."
>
> "Yes, that is true," agreed Halima, the Malay woman. Even in Cape Town the women are better behaved. They go out with men but they behave themselves." (44)

This conversation clearly demonstrates the universality of the patriarchal system and also the difficulty involved in dismantling it. Not only are the women the upholders of morality, but it is they who start the crisis which ends with Habiba's and Rookeya's departure. It begins with the outburst of Aziz Khan's wife who becomes the upholder of the Muslim faith: "When the two sisters arrived, she [Aziz Khan's wife] scrutinized their bulging bellies and spat and screamed: 'O Muslim women! O Muslim women! What have you done! What have you done! O Allah punish the women who call themselves Muslims and sin before you'" (44-45). This implied violence is concretized when the men take over. Aziz Khan, her husband first approaches gangster Gool and Molvi Haroon to oust the women, but on their refusal, he finally hires Mr. Joosub, a devout Muslim. Mr. Joosub indulges

in physical violence: "First he approached Rookeya and smacked her resoundingly on the cheek, shouting 'Pig! Bitch! Pig'[4] in Gujarati. Habiba, who tried to escape past him, received a blow on the head. She fell and nearly came tumbling down the stairs" (47). He throws all their belongings out and even "clutches" their babies. They are finally rescued by Solomon, who, as his name signifies, is not Muslim, and the story ends with the two sisters leaving the premises. The entire incident takes place with the complete support of the community women.

Although Essop focuses primarily on gender relations, he does bring up children's issues. The narrator identifies children as major victims of apartheid and patriarchy. In "Gerty's Brother," the narrator's focus is not so much on the relationship between Hussein, an Indian man, and Gerty, a white woman, but the effect it has on Riekie, Gerty's brother. He and his sister are poor Whites and are exploited by Hussein: "she took on the role of mistress and domestic servant and Riekie became the pageboy" (127). When Hussein and Gerty break up for fear of being caught, it is Riekie who doesn't understand how apartheid works and consequently suffers most:

> One Sunday I was on my way to post some letters and when I turned the corner in Park Road there was Riekie, standing beside the iron gate that led to my friend's rooms. He was clutching two bars with his hands, and shouting for Hussein . . .. His voice was bewildered.

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[4] Being labelled "Pig! " is a religious insult for Muslims because according to their belief a pig is the lowest of all creatures.

> The ugly animal living in the yard lurched out of his room and croaked: "Go way, boy, go way white boy. No Hussein here. Go way."
>
> Riekie shook the barred gate and called for Hussein over and over again, and his voice was smothered by the croaks of the old man. (128)

Essop's Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker questions simple loyalties and deconstructs loyalty to race or gender or class alone. Essop shows that power does not work within the strict confines of colour, without regard to gender or class. Rather, all three are inter-dependent, and intersect to form a complex structure that has to be analyzed in its entirety before we can hope for a better tomorrow.

Jayapraga Reddy's On the Fringe of Dreamtime and Other Stories

Jayapraga Reddy's On the Fringe of Dreamtime and Other Stories focuses primarily on class and gender. Reddy, unlike Essop, is concerned not so much with the psychological impact of apartheid, but rather with its material consequences. Although she presents the economic state of people under apartheid, this does not mean that she ignores the issue of race. In South Africa class tends to be synonymous with race, so by focusing on class she simultaneously focuses on race. Besides class and race, Reddy focuses on gender relations both within traditional patriarchy and within a patriarchy exacerbated by apartheid. Reddy also focuses on how apartheid and patriarchy affect children. Most of the stories within the collection deal with children's issues. Under apartheid laws which do not recognize the Black

(African) family unit, it is the children especially who suffer. Moreover, since they are South Africa's future, children's issues take on an added urgency. The collection opens with "A Gift for Rajendra," a story about an old Indian barber and his association with a crippled Indian child, Rajendra, and ends with "The Slumbering Spirit," the story of an older White woman, Miss Anderson, and her friendship with a Colored boy, Terry. At the centre of the collection is "In the Shadow of Desire," the story of a childless African couple, Lucas and Bella. After "ten years of barrenness and waiting" (55), Bella finally does get pregnant. The "ten years of barrenness" are perhaps symbolic of the stagnation of South Africa under apartheid. Before change can be achieved, apartheid and patriarchy must be dismantled.

As in Essop's collection, Reddy's stories do not overtly represent apartheid in the form of an evil Boer. Instead it is represented as a system of economic exploitation. She depicts the South African hierarchy-- White/Indian/African-- through economic relations. Reddy primarily focuses on domestic service, an institution which Jackyln Cock in Maids and Madams: Domestic Workers Under Apartheid, defines as "a microcosm of the exploitation and inequality on which the entire social order is based" (Cock 4). It constitutes "a significant source of employment for one million black women," and leads to a breaking up of families and the separation of mothers from their children (Cock 2). This focus also enables Reddy to question the oversimplified notion of a universal "sisterhood" which would stand united against White and Black patriarchy. As Cock argues: "In South Africa . . . [this] challenge is sharpest in the institution of domestic service where the wages paid and the hours of work exacted by white 'madams' from their black 'maids' suggest a measure of oppression of women by women" (Cock 1). Reddy disrupts this White/Black, oppressor/oppressed binary by placing the Indian

women in this hierarchy, women who are both servants and also capable of having maids. Reddy posits that the question of class will have to be tackled before any kind of sisterhood--Black or White--is possible.

"The Stolen Hours" and "Friends" are stories of two African maids, Doreen and Bessie, Doreen works for a White woman, Vera Fairley, and Bessie for an Indian woman, Sadhana. Reddy partially captures the working conditions of maids in South Africa in these stories. Cock writes:

> as an occupational group domestic workers are subject to a level of "ultra-exploitation." They are denied a negotiated wage, reasonable working hours, family and social life. They are also denied favourable working conditions, respectful treatment and any acknowledgment of the dignity of their labour, as well as specific legal protection and effective bargaining power. (4)

In "The Stolen Hours," Doreen is a regarded as a "tireless machine" looking after the dogs, the children, and also Mrs. Vera Fairley, her employer. In "Friends" Bessie is the one who cleans incessantly: "The kitchen was a mess. The bread and milk were uncovered. Someone had spilled tea on the table. O well, Bessie would clear up" (106). The only time that Doreen gets a break from her domestic duties occurs when the Fairley family goes on an annual holiday for three weeks. But even in their absence she is still bound by Vera's "myriad instructions" (69). Her real time off is the "two weeks leave" she gets for her "yearly visit home" (69). And this has been the pattern for the past ten years of Doreen's employment.

Since this is the social space within which women of different races most frequently encounter each other in South Africa (Cock 1), what kind of

relationship do they form with each other during their interaction? In these stories, their relationship seems to functions within the master-servant sphere, and Doreeen and Bessie are primarily perceived in their occupational role as servants. Whereas in "The Stolen Hours," Vera has a paternalistic attitude towards Doreen and trusts her "to a point" (70), in "Friends" Bessie and Sadhana have a strictly master-servant relationship. There seems to be no desire to see them as more than servants. According to Cock, "women's relationships with their servants must be located in a tangled skein of attitudes towards blacks generally " (Cock). The "colonized is never characterized in an individual manner; he[/she] is entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity" (Memmi, qtd. in Cock 116). Vera's and Sadhana's relationships with their individual servants are submerged in this impersonal racial sea.

That their relationship does not go beyond the maid-madam sphere is made clearer through Vera's and Sadhana's attitude towards Doreen's and Bessie's children. Doreen and Bessie are separated from their children because of apartheid laws and the conditions of domestic service itself. Although Vera and Sadhana are mothers themselves, they have no sympathy for this separation. This is made clear when Doreen's four-year-old daughter comes to live with her because she is ill and needs treatment: "Vera was tolerant at first, but then viewed her prolonged stay with suspicion" (71). Vera's callous attitude is expressed in a conversation with a friend: "'I just hope she's not here for good. You know how it is, a temporary arrangement can so easily become a permanent thing. Soon the whole family will settle here'" (71). Sadhana's attitude to Bessie's child parallels Vera's attitude: "Really did Bessie have to bring her everyday? She was making a habit of it.

At first, it had just been once or twice a week. Her excuse being that there was no one to look after her. How had she managed all these days?" (106).

In "Celebration" Bala and Shamala, an Indian couple, have worked for an older white woman, Miss Johnson, for eighteen years (47). Unlike Sadhana, Indians inhabit the position of the servants in this story. While Shamala functions as a maid, Bala runs household errands. The relationship they share with Miss Johnson is framed by the same master-servant narrative. After eighteen years, Shamala still calls her "Miss Johnson" and she remains a "stranger" who will "die alone, her memories, her secrets interred with her" (47). But more importantly, the story focuses on the problem of Indian patriarchy, a patriarchy which is exacerbated by the situation itself. Bala is extremely frustrated with the conditions of work. His job as a live-in servant is entirely dependent on the whims of the employer; even after eighteen years of service he has no security nor the legal rights to bargain for it. Bala vents his frustration and powerlessness on his wife, Shamala, and his son, Kevin. His anger and frustration are reflected both in the language used to describe him--he is labelled "a wild enraged bull"--and in his constant bullying attitude towards Shamala and Kevin (49).

Reddy also focuses on traditional Indian patriarchy. In "The Time to Yield" she deals with the system of arranged marriage, a system Reddy presents in economic terms. Zainab is being forced to marry Farouk so that their families can conclude a business deal, as Zainab tells the readers: "when the marriage arrangements were over, her father had concluded an important business deal with the khans, and now Khan and Joosab were partners" (95). Zainab's objectification is emphasized in the way "her string of old aunts" treat her: "They ran their eyes greedily over her fresh young body and touched her with creepy hands. They cackled lewdly. . .. She felt their

stale breath on her, reeking of betel leaves and soiling her. Their raucous voices filled the room" (100-01). Reddy, like Essop, goes on to reveal how women are implicated in upholding this patriarchal system. Zainab's mother, Ayesha, both as a wife and a mother, is empowered by this system, and when Zainab refuses to marry Farouk, she resorts to violence:

> She struck her then. Two hard slaps . . .. "I should have done that long ago!" she said with grim satisfaction. "Let that be a lesson to you! I blame your father for this. He spoilt you. He gave you everything. And what good has it done? All that education, wasted! I never believed education was good for women. But your father never listened to me. And now what does he get? A proud and headstrong daughter!" (99)

Ayesha's hard-handed tactics are replaced by Zainab's Hajee's (grandmother) persuasive tactics. Like Zainab, Hajee had an arranged marriage, and she used her beauty as a form of power in order to have some agency within her relationship. She tells Zainab to "stop fighting" the situation and use her beauty as a form of empowerment:

> "Women are the same today as they have been over centuries . . .. Women have the same needs, the same desires, the same hopes and dreams, the same roles and abilities. . . and the same power, as women throughout the ages."
>
> "Power!" exclaimed Zainab, incredulous.
>
> "Yes power," the old woman repeated with quiet emphasis

> . . . . "My child, you have great beauty . . . . And remember there is power in beauty too." (103)

Although Reddy recognizes that sometimes beauty is the only form of power available, she also suggests that ultimately it is not liberating. As Susan Sontag argues in her essay "Beauty": "It is a power that negates itself. For this power is not one that can be chosen freely--at least not by women--or renounced without social censure" (162).

In this collection, Reddy also portrays the dilemma of children who are the victims of apartheid and patriarchy, and suggests that children suffer even more than women. "In Snatch the Wind and Run," Reddy shows how apartheid's reduction of Coloured people to poverty affects children. Gregory, a Coloured boy, who lives in utter poverty with his father and stepmother, wins a lottery, and his parents, who are themselves the victims of poverty, forcibly try to take the prize money away from him. This circumstance leads to his physical abuse and subsequent placement in a delinquent home after he stabs his father in self-defense. In "Friends," Asha is ill-treated by her mother, Sadhana, who is upset by her husband's "lack of interest and enthusiasm" (105). While watching "a Hema Malini film" (which reflects Sadhana's life story) she is interrupted by Asha and slaps her:

> "I'm hungry," Asha said.
>
> But Sadhana was caught in the drama and did not heed her. Asha tugged at her sleeve impatiently. "I'm hungry!" she wailed. Sadhana held out her half eaten roti. "Have this," she said absently.

> The child flung the proffered roll on the floor in a fit of temper. Sadhana slapped her sharply on her hand and called Bessie to clean up the mess.
>
> "Go and play outside. You are worrying me for nothing!" (108)

Reddy seems to suggest that when people are oppressed, they tend to recreate the power structure and oppress their lowers, and consequently children suffer the most. But the story does not end here: the children go on to recreate this power structure in their own lives. In "Snatch the Wind and Run" Gregory is beaten by the children at the house for "delinquents and problematic children":

> Soon he was surrounded. He clutched the bedclothes defensively. Perhaps his silence infuriated them. He didn't know. But with one accord, they whipped off his bedclothes. "Let's fix him," one of them said, and with one accord, they dragged him to the floor.
>
> He struggled vainly trying to ward off their kicks and blows. But he was defeated by sheer numbers. (30)

In "Friends, after Asha is mistreated by her mother, she goes on to mistreat her friend Phumza, who is the daughter of Bessie, the maid. First, she breaks her doll, which she knows Phumza secretly desires:

> Asha looked up and met her eyes. She read the unspoken yearning and felt something stir and uncoil in within. When it broke loose she did nothing to restrain it. Suddenly she grabbed the doll by the

> hair and flung it to the ground. Phumza watched in horror as she trampled it viciously. (109)

Later, when Phumza is nursing the broken doll, Asha takes it back again: "The sight of Phumza so at home with the doll, brought all her frustrations and ill-temper to the fore. With a swift moment, she ripped the doll off her back" (110).

Reddy suggests that this recreation of the power structure is something children learn from their elders. Since these children are the future of South Africa, it is very important that they learn a different lesson. In order to ensure that, Reddy suggests that the women look after them and nurture them. In "Snatch the Wind and Run" the boys who are beating Gregory are interrupted by "a house-mother," and later it is Miss Mason who gets him released and retrieves his jackpot. Similarly in "Friends," Phumza is taught an important lesson by her mother Bessie:

> Bessie emerged with a bucket of washing. Her eyes took in the scene quickly. She spoke quietly but firmly.
>
> "Give it back my child," she said in Xhosa.
>
> Phumza looked at her mother in disbelief.
>
> "But she broke it and threw it," she pointed out.
>
> "Never mind. Give it back. It's still hers." (111)

Reddy partially presents her solution in "The Spirit of Two Worlds," a story which ends with the reconciliation of two women--the mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law--and makes space for the nurturing of children. At the beginning of the story, when her daughter-in-law, Sharda, and her son

Veeran, want to leave the extended family, the old woman, the head of the family and the continuing symbol of patriarchy, is upset. The story ends with a partial recognition of the old woman's own bondage and that of "generations of women before her," and the disintegration of the patriarchal extended family (9). It heralds a new way of living in which women can form a support group but not have the power to oppress each other, and this is reflected in the ending itself:

> "Sharda will have give up work now," he pointed out.
>
> The old woman turned to Sharda. When their eyes met, there was a new gentleness, a new peace in the old woman's eyes.
>
> "No, she doesn't have to. I will look after the child," she stated serenely.
>
> She put the child down and rose. The spirit of the two worlds had merged. (16)

Farida Karodia's Coming Home and Other Stories

In Coming Home and other Stories, focusing on race, class and gender, Karodia analyzes how apartheid is both materially and psychologically damaging for Black people, and moreover when it is combined with patriarchy its biggest victims are women and children. Like Reddy, she focuses on children. Given the conditions in South Africa there is a high incidence of child mortality, and she presents some cases within the collection itself. Not only does she reveal the workings of power, but like Reddy she goes on to offer solutions for a better world, a world where men, women, and children of all races can live together . This vision is reflected

in the structure of her collection where stories of men, women and children of all ages, races and classes are laid next to each other.

Like Reddy, Karodia focuses on domestic service in "The World According to Mrs. Angela Ramsbotham." The story focuses on the working relationship between Mrs. Angela Ramsbotham, the White "Madam," and Dynamite Nkala, an African "houseboy," and Karodia studies it in terms of race and class relations. Mrs. Ramsbotham insists on calling Dynamite, Daniel, even though he has informed her that his name is Dynamite Nkala and he will not respond to Daniel. She responds: "'What kind of name is Dynamite?' She laugh[s] at his indignation and . . . blithely continues to address him by the name of her choice" (135). This act of renaming is representative of several things. It signifies a "depersonalization" of the native (Memmi, qtd. in Cock), and is representative of Mrs. Ramsbotham's paternalistic attitude; she has the right and the power to rename. As Cock argues, in South Africa "the most typical viewpoint is that servants are like children. Thus, the core characteristic of the relationship is paternalism which involves a dependence on the part of the servant and confirms the employer's sense of superiority" (121). Dynamite is aware of this paternalistic attitude as he informs the readers that "he hated this woman who treated him like a fool. To her he was no more than a child, a thirty-year-old *boy*" (135). The label "boy" or "house-boy" also nullifies Dynamite's sexuality. Moreover, he is renamed with "a white man's name"--Daniel (135). Dynamite is also labelled "lazy" by Mrs Ramsbotham, a stereotypical trait embodied by natives in general. As she informs her guests : "It's as though they have a mental block when it comes to work" (142). According to Memmi, this laziness is commonly used as a rationalisation for the payment of low wages and inequality in colonial societies:

> Nothing could better justify the coloniser's privileged position than his industry, and nothing could better justify the colonised destitution than his indolence. The mythical portrait of the colonised therefore includes an unbelievable laziness. . . . the coloniser suggests that employing the colonized is not very profitable, thereby authorising his unreasonable wages. (qtd. in Cock 163)

In "Coming Home," Karodia focuses on another form of exploitation of labour in South Africa, that of plantation workers, and presents both the material and psychological effect of colonization and apartheid on them. The story is narrated by Horace, a Coloured teacher, who, unlike his ancestors, is now outside the plantation system. Narrating his family history, Horace captures how the system ensures an endless stream of labour:

> His [Horace's grandfather] father, *Oupa* Jacobs, had worked at Driehoek [the plantation] as a cooper for most of his life, as had his father before him. *Oupa* Jacobs was the one who encouraged my father to come out when there was a shortage of construction work. But he died soon after my mother and father arrived; then Daddy was obliged to work to pay of Oupa's debts to van der Merwe. In the process of doing this my father himself became indebted. (18)

Not only are the plantation workers trapped bodily like "slaves," but the system is also designed to break their spirit. This is depicted through the

moment of Horace's initialization when he meets Koos Kleinhans, a White lorry driver, and is instantly labeled "*hotnot*":

> I couldn't help staring at Kleinhans and when he became aware of my scrutiny, he asked: "Who are you *hotnot*?"
>
> "He Simon Jacobs' boy, *Baas*," Willem replied quickly.
>
> "I'm talking to him, not you, you *verdomede bobbejaan*!"
>
> I was petrified.
>
> "Answer me are you Simon's boy, *hotnot*?"
>
> My voice deserted me and I was certain he could hear my knees knocking. He waited for my response and I opened my mouth as if to answer but no sound came. Terror-stricken I raised my head and looked up at him, nodding slowly like a marionette. I was too young, and my experience with Whites too limited, to know that we did not look a white man in the eye (this lesson I was to learn much later).
>
> . . . . "I'm talking to you," he growled again.
>
> Willem had come up beside me and with a solid clout to the side of my head said, "Say "*Ja Baas* to *Baas* Kleinhans."
>
> I glanced at the man's face and I saw that look in his eyes. It was one that I was to encounter many times in the course of my life. I hesitated, but when I saw through the corner of my eye that Willem was preparing for another swat my response was quick. "*Ja Baas*!" I cried.
>
> The white man laughed, slapping his hairy thighs while I continued my wide-eyed scrutiny. (10-11)

The plantation workers, their bodies and minds broken, are reduced to servile "*hotnots*," always addressing White people as *Baas* and "always keeping their eyes averted, their expressions a combination of self-abasement and sly, toothless grins" (10).

However, at home, the anger and frustration of the male plantation workers finds a way out, as Horace notes: "after a particularly rough day with Kleinhans I knew we would all have a hellish evening" (10). The "we" here includes his mother, his siblings and himself. His mother is constantly beaten by his father, Simon, and as a result her baby boy, Abel, is born brain -damaged. As Horace points out: "Miss Stoffels thought the damage had been caused by the poisonous sprays, but it was really the beatings. Daddy kept on beating her even when she was heavy with child" (18). Simon succeeds in breaking her spirit: "Mama had come to the farm determined to retain some vestige of dignity and pride but he broke her like a horse" (18-19). This "breaking of spirit" parallels the breaking of the spirit of the male plantation workers. This is the state of all the Coloured women on the plantation, and they do not have any sort of protection either from their own community or from the law and order system, as Ousis complains: "Where are they [the police] when some husband chokes the life out of his wife, or locks his wife in the shed and sets it on fire?" (51). Besides being victimized at home, these women, like the men, also work on the plantations and suffer all the hardships that the men do. Describing his mother's double bind, Horace notes: "It seems there was always someone pushing down on her. If it wasn't Daddy it was someone else like Piet Coetzee [the plantation owner's wife]" (24).

Children are also victims of Black patriarchy, a patriarchy exacerbated by apartheid. As Horace notes: "We all learnt what it was like to be exposed to a

father who used brutality to instill fear when respect could not be gained" (19). Along with their mother, Horace and his siblings are constantly abused by their father. The effect of this abuse on children is depicted through the example of Jerry. Jerry's father, Baba Jensen, used to regularly beat Marietjie, his mother, and "call her all sorts of names" (37). When Jerry can't take any more, he runs off to Cape Town and joins a gang. He later returns to the plantation and kills his father. As he confesses to Horace: "The bastard deserved to die. He screwed up my life" (57). His own life ends in tragedy when he is shot by the police, and his mother, Marietjie, hangs herself.

In "Ntombi," Ntombi teaches Tollie, the shepherd boy, that "the child is more important than the sheep" (113). The sheep seem to represent the black men and women, and Karodia suggests that the children have to be saved from the wolf before the sheep. The children are the inheritors of the future, and in order to ensure change the vicious circle must be broken. Karodia suggests that in order to break the vicious circle children like Jerry are caught in, men and women have to look after them. In "Coming Home," Horace's mother ensures that they escape by making them continue their education in spite of great difficulties, and she saves and hides money from her husband, so she can buy her children a "ticket to freedom" (24). After a particularly violent beating in which Simon breaks her arm and Horace tries to protect her, his mother finally sends Horace away:

> Mama leaned against the post, her dark eyes filled with misery. "I have a little money buried out in the back yard in an old tin can. I want you to dig it up."
>
> "What for?" I asked.

> "Take it and go to Capetown. Ousis has a cousin there. I know she'll put you up for a while until you can finish your schooling."
> "I don't want to leave you. He'll kill you and Sissie". . . . There was a look of intensity in her eyes that I had never seen before. "You go," she told me grabbing me with her good hand , almost choking the life out of me. (33)

She can't send her daughter, Sissie, away because she would not have survived by herself in a town. But as a result of Horace's departure, Sissie becomes a lot stronger and protects her mother: "Sissie had stood up to my father. According to Ousis he had never beat Mama while Sissie was around. She said Sissie had warned him that if he ever touched any of them again, she'd castrate him" (35). As a result of Horace being sent away, the cycle breaks, and his son Kevin has a brighter future ahead of him.

This analysis of Black patriarchy is paralleled by an analysis of White patriarchy which is also exacerbated by apartheid, and its impact on White women and children. However, due to their privileged position, White patriarchal oppression is not violent in this collection. In "The Woman in Green," Henny Marias, a Coloured woman who has sucessfully passed as White, is married to Deputy Minister Johan Muller, an Afrikaner. When she discloses her coloured ancestry to him, Henny has a "nervous breakdown" and is committed to a mental asylum where she dies. Henny's madness and the secrecy surrounding her death are representative of both racist and patriarchal oppression. In "Something in the Air," daughter and mother, Elsie and Sinnah van Staaden, are both treated poorly by Faanie van Staaden. Not only is he "gruff and offhand with her and her mother" (68), but he is too busy to spend much time with them, as Elsie complains: "He

was always too busy, she thought resentfully. . . . Even when she was a child, she and her mother hardly ever went anywhere because even at that time her father was preoccupied with terrorists and troublemakers" (68).

By focusing on the state of White women under patriarchy, along with Black women, Karodia makes a gesture towards universal sisterhood, a sisterhood which is further promoted in "iGoldie." When Treaty comes to Johannesburg in search of her son, and is turned away by her son's White boss, she is helped by his wife who both apologises for her husband's behaviour and offers her a place to sleep: "I am sorry my husband spoke so harshly to you. I know you've come a long way . . . . Here in the backyard is a spare room where you can sleep for tonight. Tomorrow you can see your son" (129). In the story there is also an unnamed Black man who saves Treaty from the tsotsis and helps her to find her son's address:

> The boys [tsotsis] were coming closer, laughing and joshing amongst themselves. With their approach she sensed the overwhelming presence of evil. . . .
>
> A hand tapped her shoulder. She gasped in fright almost dropping her mat. Slowly with trembling limbs, she turned.
>
> It was the man she had spoken to outside the building.
>
> "Come with me. I will take you to that address," he said. (125)

Karodia suggests that a unified Black people along with White women and children, can dismantle both apartheid and White and Black patriarchy, and ensure the healing of an entire people.

Conclusion

Writing the ordinary, Essop, Reddy, and Karodia establish a womanist discourse in their works, demonstrating the interdependence of race, class, and gender, and the need to address them simultaneously in order to effect change. Although their vision arises from their position as Indian South Africans, it offers strategies for the liberation and healing of all South African people. Their vision is both particular and universal, and ultimately extends to entire people, offering an insight into the world's future:

> To find our measure, exactly,
> not the echo of other voices.
> The present *growing out of our lungs*
> like a flower, with a smell
> that we have *re-traced through our veins*
> some dark, secret smell
> that will bloom when the hour has struck
> an animal smell
> reminiscent of blood
> *the world's scent*. (Antigone Kefala, qtd. in Reuck 30; my Italics)

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